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FIFTEEN THOUSAND MILES  
IN A KETCH

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*The Committee of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution have called the attention of the publishers to the fact that Captain du Baty seems to have misunderstood the situation described on pages 32-33, and it has been thought desirable to add this correction. The crew of a lifeboat, in their capacity as salvors of property, are not acting as servants of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. It was in their capacity of salvors of property that the coxswain and crew asked for the sum ultimately paid by Captain du Baty, and they were within their rights in doing so. The Institution, so far from doing anything to enforce payment in this case, wrote, through its Secretary, deprecating any claim, being under the impression that the vessel was owned by people who might not be able to afford payment. This impression turned out to be erroneous. The publishers are convinced that Captain du Baty would be the first to desire to give publicity to this correction.*

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# FIFTEEN THOUSAND MILES IN A KETCH

*by*

CAPTAIN RAYMOND RALLIER  
DU BATY

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*Raymond Rallier du Baty was born in Brittany in  
1880.*

## P R E F A C E

SINCE Francis Drake went round the world in the *Golden Hind* there has perhaps been no voyage quite so venturesome as that in a little French fishing ketch, of forty-five tons, called the *J. B. Charcot*, which set out from Boulogne in September of the year 1907, and, sailing across the South Atlantic, and the Antarctic and Indian seas, lay to outside Melbourne Harbour in July 1909—a distance of 15,000 miles.

She was commanded by two young Frenchmen hardly more than boys in age, though captains in the French merchant service, named Raymond and Henri du Baty, and she carried a tiny crew of one seaman and three lads.

When a little while ago Captain Raymond Rallier du Baty was welcomed home by the

French Geographical Society, Prince Roland Bonaparte, its president, summed up the voyage in the following words:

‘You are sixteenth-century adventurers,’ he said, ‘who have been lost in the twentieth.’

The story of their remarkable trip in the little *J. B. Charcot*, named after the famous French explorer who has just returned from the Antarctic, as written by the leader of the expedition, is a true and vivid tale of romance and adventure which carries one back to the youth of the world, when men first began to venture out into unknown seas in frail craft. With high spirits, full of French gaiety, he tells of terrific storms encountered by his fishing boat, and of the many hardships which they faced with brave hearts.



# FIFTEEN THOUSAND MILES IN A KETCH

## CHAPTER I

‘Thus having said, he bids us put to sea.  
We loose from shore our halsers and obey,  
And soon with swelling sails pursue our watery way.’  
VIRGIL.

I TELL a tale of the sea. It is a tale of a small sailing boat and of six men, of whom I was one, and of a long voyage, and of many strange adventures in lonely places off the track of the world's highways. As a plain seaman I write, without pretence of literary art and grace, yet able to put down the straight, simple truth of the things I have seen, and of the things that happened. As I write my memory goes back to those two years of wandering, and I live again through all the experiences of the days of those years,

and on the blank pages of this paper before me I see the wild scenery of a desert island, the great immensity of storm-lashed seas, the familiar faces of my comrades. Old voices speak to me, the voices of the wind and ocean, of sea-birds and sea-beasts, of the friends who went on the long lone trail with me. It is a strange thing this craft of penmanship, to which I am unaccustomed. It brings back the thrill and the life of days that have passed. Perhaps those who read my tale may be quickened to the sense of the realities that lie behind the written words.

I am going, then, to tell the story of my voyaging for nearly two years—from September 1907 to the end of July 1909—in a small French fishing ketch, the *J. B. Charcot*, from Boulogne to Melbourne, a distance, in our somewhat zig-zag course, of 15,000 miles. There have been other sailing ships which have gone longer voyages than that many times, but I suppose since the great English seaman, Sir Francis Drake, went round the world in the *Golden Hind*, no boat so small,

and so modestly equipped and with such a tiny crew, has ventured across the Atlantic and Indian oceans, facing the perils and suffering the hardships which are inevitable to such a voyage. I make no claim to fame for having sailed in so small a boat, for I frankly confess that if I could have scraped up more money I would have bought a bigger and a better ship. Not that I have anything but affectionate memories of the dear little *J. B. Charcot*, which served us sturdily and bravely through many a wild storm, and at times when even the largest ship afloat would have been glad to run for shelter.

But it was the smallness of the boat which makes our adventure unusual, and to other people almost laughable. I also laugh now and find amusement in the poverty-stricken way in which we set out on this voyage of exploration. It was no laughing matter when we were caught—a hundred times—in hurricanes which threatened to smash our timbers, and did actually drive us three times on to the rocks. The results of the expedition

were not epoch-making. We did not bring back news of having discovered the North Pole or the South Pole. That was not our ambition. Nevertheless we explored many unknown islands and mapped many uncharted coasts and hidden reefs, and made a great number of soundings in narrow straits strewn with rocks, by which my fellow-sailors of all nations will benefit when they may pass that way. We also brought back a good many specimens, geological, botanical and entomological, new to the museums, so that in a scientific way the results of the little trip were interesting.

But this story is addressed more to the general reader than to the sailor and the scientist, and I am about to tell the story of my adventures, rather than of my discoveries. People are still interested in the romance of the sea. I remember with what excitement I have read all such stories from *Robinson Crusoe* downwards. My narrative may be read in the same spirit.

We were six men on board the little

*J. B. Charcot*, and for many long months we saw no other human beings and led a strange, lonely, but not miserable life. After our voyage for four thousand miles to Tristan da Cunha, that island midway between South Africa and South America upon which is the most curious and interesting and solitary little community of English-speaking people in the world, we sailed again through many terrible storms without the sight of another ship until we came to Kerguelen, or the Island of Desolation as it is called by American sealers. Upon that great group of barren, desolate, uninhabited islands we lived for many months quite alone.

It was truly a Robinson Crusoe kind of existence, and people at home who sleep in soft beds, and eat good food every day, but whose imagination is fired by the romance of a hard, adventurous life, may find interest and amusement in the plain unvarnished tale of how we spent our time ; how we, six good comrades, cut off from civilisation and thrown upon our own society, faced the daily dangers

and hardships of our lot ; how we obtained food ; how we kept our sanity and self-respect in the long loneliness ; how we came very close to Nature in its wildest and most primitive conditions ; how after many months we met good friends with news from the outer world, and with the little luxuries for which some of us had yearned ; and how finally we left the desert islands and sailed through terrific tempests on the long track to Australia, where the sight of the little French ketch from Boulogne-sur-mer was hailed with astonishment in Melbourne Harbour.

That is my story, and the details of it are not, I hope, dull. To us, at the time, each little incident was exciting. From each peril we escaped with praise and thankfulness at our good luck. Perhaps people who read this book will realise some of our own emotions, and in imagination share some of the impressions of our life.

To start with I must introduce myself in a few words to the reader. I was twenty-five years old when I bought the *J. B.*



*Charcot*, and I had not yet got my certificate as *Capitaine au long cours* (captain in the merchant service), which I now possess. But I knew the sea pretty well. The sea was in my blood, for I had been born on the coast of Brittany at Laurient, within sound of the waves, and my people belonged to the sea. My father was a commander in the French navy, my uncle was an admiral, many of my ancestors had 'gone down to the sea in ships.' As boys my brothers and I were always boating and swimming, and though I said nothing about my ambitions for many years, I knew that I could not avoid the family spell. Curiously enough, my father and mother did not understand this. I was sent to a Jesuit college, and being of a serious, quiet nature, they had the idea that I should become a magistrate. I smile now at the thought that but for my blood I might have been a grave and learned person in a black gown and square cap!

One day, when I was eighteen years of age, my father came to me and said: 'Raymond,

it is time you began to think of your career.

‘What are you going to be?’

I looked up and said very simply: ‘I am going to be a sailor, father.’

He was astonished.

‘But it is too late for the navy, my son.’

‘Yes, but there is still the merchant service,’ I said.

My father was shocked. There is a great gulf between the two branches of seaman-ship. The bridge has not yet been built that can cross such a gulf. But I had my way, and as a sailor before the mast I made a voyage round the world in a big sailing ship. After some years at sea, I was lucky in getting appointed as mate to Dr. Charcot’s Antarctic Expedition of 1903-5. That was my first experience of Antarctic exploration, and in spite of the hardships—and there were times when it was not altogether a picnic, you must understand—I was fired with the ambition to continue in this line of work. Dr. Charcot was a gallant and generous leader

and a source of continual inspiration to the men who served with him. He is still my great hero, and it is the proudest fact of my life that I was permitted to share, in a humble way, the work of that great expedition.

But afterwards, being as you know a very young man, and therefore a little ambitious, I kept wondering what I could do on my own account in the way of exploration. It seemed to me that it would be a very excellent idea if I set out to discover something! But there was one little trouble. I was a poor man. My poverty was really most embarrassing to my ambitions. But I had some small savings, and I had a brother with a few pounds also. He was a sailor like myself, and in the merchant service, and when, after a good deal of silent thought, I put my idea before him, he was not at all unsympathetic.

My idea was to lead an expedition to Kerguelen, that collection of barren islands in the Indian Ocean. I had often heard of it as an old haunt of sealers, but I knew that

it was now uninhabited and that it was to a great extent uncharted. It seemed to me that if, by hook or by crook, we could get a small boat of our own, it would be a merry adventure to get across the world from France to Australia, exploring the Island of Desolation on our way. There were plenty of seals there, and seal oil is worth £17 a ton. If we had luck we might pay our expenses with a little to the good by carrying a cargo of oil to Melbourne.

But that was not the chief inducement for going. What appealed to me more irresistibly as each day went by, was the prospect of adding some new knowledge to the history of exploration. I wanted to be a good disciple of Dr. Charcot. I bought a chart of Kerguelen, and my brother and I pored over it for hours together. It was a chart like one of those made by the early navigators, when Vasco da Gama and Sebastian Cabot and the Spanish and Dutch and English 'sea-dogs' were sailing the waters of the world, for much of the coast-line of that

archipelago was but vaguely outlined and great parts of it had been quite unexplored.

Here was a chance for good work and good adventure! My brother and I had already explored the island in imagination long before we had bought our boat.

That was now to be done. What was the best boat we could buy for the smallest amount of money?

I went to Boulogne and, without telling anybody a word of my plans, searched the shipyards for a good vessel. I saw many fine seaworthy ships awaiting a purchaser, but, alas! they were very costly. I could as soon have bought a mail steamer. There were others which had served for years in the coasting trade and had been scarred and weather-worn in many a storm at sea. I went among these, and with my knife stabbed their timbers and thrust between the planks, to test the strength of them. Some of them were rotten and leaky. It would have been like putting to sea in a ready-made coffin to go out in one of them.

But at last I found a ketch, or fishing boat, which seemed to promise well. It was called the *Sacré Cœur de Jésus*. It had done years of service and it had been handed over to a shipbuilder as part payment for a new boat. It was not a beautiful object. The bulwarks were smashed; it had no masts or spars; the deck was rotten and broken and it was nothing but an old hull.

But I could see that the hull itself was sound, and that the timbers ought to stand the strain of many more years of weather. The more I looked at her the more I believed that when some money had been spent upon her, and when she was fitted out with new masts and rigging, she would not make us ridiculous or ashamed when we hoisted our flag. Her length of hull was 50 feet, so that you will see we were not about to set out on a journey across the world in a vessel of prodigious size! She was indeed nothing more than an ordinary Boulogne ketch of 48 tons, but I believed that my scanty means would make her seaworthy



in fair weather or foul. So I made my bargain.

I need not hide how much I paid for that old hull. People will be amused to know that we crossed two oceans, and weathered two years of storms, in a boat that we bought for no more than £60. Of course we had to spend a good deal more than that before she was ready for our trip. We had to fit her out with new masts, rigging and sails—an expensive business; we had to put in a new deck and new bulwarks; to build new cabin space, and strengthen the hold. We also put on board four rowing boats, two of them being light and flat-bottomed, for landing in shallow water, and two being heavier rowing boats with keels.

Altogether we spent something like £600 in making shipshape the *Sacré Cœur de Jésus*, which henceforth was to be called the *J. B. Charcot* in honour of the famous French explorer with whom I had been in the Antarctic.

I look back with pleasure to that work at

Boulogne. We were young men, and it was a joyous thing to us to be the sole proprietors of a vessel; and like boys who build their first toy yacht, we took the keenest delight and pride in all the carpentering and shipbuilding work that filled up two months of our time. Finally, when we had put some paint on the hull and fixed up the rigging, and hoisted our sails, the *J. B. Charcot* seemed to us a pretty thing of which we might well be proud. But even then I could not help laughing at the insignificant size of the boat in which I proposed to voyage so far.

I now had to be very busy in provisioning the ship for the expedition and getting the equipment necessary for a sealing trip, for life on a desert island, and for a voyage in which we should be many months out of touch with land. All this wanted a great deal of careful thought, for not only our own lives, but the lives of those unknown men who were to be our crew depended upon the sound judgment with which we chose our

stores. Long ago I had drawn up a careful list of what I wanted to take, but I soon found out the difference between equipping a Charcot or Shackleton expedition and a modest little venture like my own, for the ideal list was far beyond my purse.

I was determined, however, not to make cheapness a virtue but to buy the best of everything. I know how fatal economy has been in voyages of exploration. I went therefore to Damoy, the well-known dealer in Paris who has provisioned many expeditions. I take this opportunity of expressing my best thanks to him. He gave me very low prices when I let him into the secret of our proposed adventure, and sent back 500 francs when I paid the bill. It is not often that one meets with such generous dealing.

As our life for the next two years depended to a great extent upon the stores which we took on board the *J. B. Charcot* at Boulogne, I think it will be of interest to give some idea of their character.

I bought first of all a large quantity of boiled beef in tins, and tinned vegetables which included beans, peas, and cabbages, and carrots, cut up into small pieces. We took many cases of ship-biscuits, sufficient for six men for two years, a large stock of rice, and a quantity of vermicelli, which proved to be one of our best supplies, as we never grew tired of it, though we sickened of the preserved meat. Pemmican for shore journeys, soup tablets, a few delicacies for special occasions, like *pâté de foie gras*, chocolate, dried plums, almonds and raisins, pickles, and many cases of tea, coffee and cocoa, and tinned milk, concluded a list of food-stuffs which was cut down to the barest necessities.

It is usual in the French merchant service for the sailors to have a daily allowance of rum and wine. In our case the smallness of the vessel and the length of our journey would make it impossible to carry so many casks of wine and spirit. We therefore took enough wine to last for about five months

at the rate of  $\frac{1}{2}$  a litre daily per man, and a small quantity of rum in case of sickness.

Water, of course, was of the utmost importance and we carried 2 tons in cement-lined tanks. As will be seen, we were able to replenish these tanks at Madeira and Rio, and there was always plenty in Kerguelen.

Included in the list of general stores were :—

4 guns : 2 double-barrelled for small shot ;  
1 army rifle of the Gras pattern ; 1  
double-barrelled gun, shooting bullets  
from one barrel and shot from  
another.

2 cameras : 1 Kodak with films ; 1  
camera with plates.

Chronometer.

Sounding instruments.

Theodolyte.

Barometers.

Thermometers.

Sextants.

Other navigating instruments.

Material for making casks.

Picks and shovels.

Carpenters' tools.

Blasting cartridges.

Spare sailcloth, with needles and twine.

Axes.

Furnace and 'kettles' for melting seal blubber.

1 tent.

We had spent most of our money by the time we had obtained these stores, but at the end of two months, after the idea had been first settled, we were happy in having a good little boat and an equipment that was modest but sufficient for a long trip.

There had been no trouble in obtaining a crew. As soon as we had begun to be busy in Boulogne the news had gone round that we were preparing for a voyage of adventure, and many seafaring men and lads came to volunteer for the job. We did not want old men, or married men, or men who were not prepared to do a great deal of hard work on shore as well as at sea, which is outside the



usual contract of French sailors. We preferred youth rather than experience, and brave hearts rather than much wisdom. As a matter of fact, we obtained a crew in which both youthful spirit and seamanship were combined, and the bravery of which will never be forgotten by me.

I will give a complete list of the crew here (it was not very large!), although one among them—Larose—only joined us later when we were in an English harbour.

|                          |                     |            |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Henri Rallier du Baty:   | Captain, aged 27.   | } Bretons. |
| Raymond Rallier du Baty: | Mate, aged 25.      |            |
| Jean Bontemps:           | Boatswain, aged 43. | Basque.    |
| Léon Agnès:              | Sailor, aged 22.    | } Normans. |
| Eugène Larose:           | Sailor, aged 18.    |            |
| Louis Esnault:           | Cook, aged 16.      |            |

It will be seen that my brother Henri was rated as captain. He was older than I, and therefore I thought he ought to have the position of chief navigating officer, while I was organiser and leader of the expedition. Of the men and lads I shall have much to say

later on, and here it is sufficient just to indicate their characters.

Jean Bontemps, for example, was a sailor of the old-fashioned school who had lived at sea for most of the years of his life, who had crossed the Line a score of times, who was a handy-man at all the craft of seamanship, and who had a firm belief in his own way of doing things. Superstitious, hard-headed, slow of speech, he was tremendously strong, and absolutely faithful to those in command. We asked no more of him.

Agnès was a tall, fair fellow who had been away in the cod fisheries off Newfoundland. He had dreamy blue eyes which seemed to see a thousand miles off, and his greatest recreation was to play the accordion and sing old Norman songs in a voice that was not unmusical. I found him always intelligent, interested in all the things around him, and a pleasant companion. He and I have had many great adventures together. We have risked death together. We have spent many days alone together on the grim rocks, and in

the brooding silence of the Island of Desolation. I shall always remember Agnès as a friend, brave as a lion, true as steel, a good fellow.

Larose—what shall I say? Larose, too, was faithful, and quite fearless, and what was best of all perhaps, he provided our laughter. Even now I laugh every time I think of Larose with his puffed-out cheeks and his enormous, insatiable, all-devouring appetite. He was the comedy man of the *J. B. Charcot*, and I think a little later on my readers will like to follow his adventures in search of food.

Louis Esnault was the cook. Did I say 'cook'? Well, he could fry fish, and he certainly broke all our plates, and in his galley on deck there was always a great smell. Yes, he was our cook, but I ate the meals he had prepared with blind confidence and without thinking of all the dark mysteries that had gone before. But he did his best, poor lad, and worked hard, and was brave also, and I am grateful to him.

Well, there we were then, with our ship and our stores and our crew, and towards the end of September 1907, we were ready to start on our adventures. By some means or another the object of our expedition had leaked out, but the first news of it was given to the general public by a two-column article in *Le Matin*. Interest and curiosity were aroused, and a few days before we got away, numbers of people swarmed on board to have a look at the little ketch which was going across the world. We were laughed at a good deal. Our visitors cried '*Ciel!*' and '*Sapristi!*' and lifted up their eyes and their hands in wonder, and were good enough to say that we were going to our deaths, but wished us '*Bon Voyage*' all the same. It was all very droll.

Our friends, however, were very generous. M. Fourny, a Boulogne shipowner, lent us a tug which took us out of harbour, and carried a number of shipowners who came to see us off. It was at 6 A.M. on the morning of 22nd September 1907 that we hoisted sail

and flew the French flag. Crowds of people were on the quayside and gave us parting cheers, and as my brother and I stood at the helm, we felt very proud and happy. After our months of hard work in planning and organising, it was good now to stand on our own little boat, to see our sails bellying out in a good breeze, to hear the wash of the water along our sides, to see the sunlight glancing on the waves, and to be at last on our way to the great venture which had been in my dreams so long.

As yet, however, we did not leave the shores of France. We ran round to Cherbourg, where the French Minister of Marine generously lent us a number of navigating instruments, thereby acknowledging that our little vessel was bound for a serious scientific expedition worthy of official recognition, instead of being merely out for adventure and seal-hunting. From Cherbourg I made a train journey to Paris to say good-bye to my parents. All such partings leave one a little sad and serious, and in that family fare-

well there was the thought that we might never meet again on this side of the grave. But, after all, that thought does not affect a family of sailors too much. The risks of a seafaring life are accepted as a matter of course. My father and mother had said good-bye to their sons many times before, and there was no reason to be miserable or melancholy on this occasion. In spite of my father's regret that we had not followed the family traditions and joined the French navy, I think he was glad that we were engaged in a venture in which, perhaps, we might gain a little honour. He wished us good luck, and my mother gave me her blessing, and I knew the prayers of that good woman would follow me across the world.

I went back to Cherbourg with a new source of courage and hope, and from that port we sailed on 13th October. I chose that day deliberately to prove that I was free from superstition, and I remembered that Nansen had once started on Friday, the 13th, for the same reason, and without those awful results

which ought to have attended him if old sailors' tales could be believed.

As we left the coast, all of us on board that little boat took a long last look at the land we loved so well. We were to pass through many storms and many perils before any of us would see the shores of France again. Yet we were not dispirited at the thought. We were all bachelors, and we left no weeping wives and children behind. Hope was in front of us, and a thousand adventures called to us down the wind. My brother and I were young enough to go gaily into the heart of the unknown, whatever luck or ill-luck might be lurking there.



## CHAPTER II

'To heaven aloft on ridgy waves we ride  
Then down to hell descend when they divide.'

VIRGIL.

I TOLD you I am not superstitious. Yet confess that if I had any leanings that way should have regretted my audacity in starting upon a thirteenth day of the month.

Soon after leaving Cherbourg we had bad weather, and the voyage of the *J. B. Charco* began with a most miserable and ridiculous series of misadventures. A strong south-west gale blew up the Channel, and we could make no progress on our course, but kept tacking about for two days between the Casquets and the Eddystone light. Old Bontemps the boatswain—we called him 'old' Bontemps for he was nearly twice the age of most of us, though in the prime of life—shook his head very

mournfully and with an expression of 'I told you so.' He knew it was flying in the face of providence to start on the thirteenth.

My brother and I were not exactly anxious, but alert to the fact that at the very outset of our long trail our little boat was to be put to the test. We knew that if she failed us now and showed any sign of being unseaworthy, we should have no chance of success when we faced fiercer storms than this south-westerly gale within call of home. At the end of two days I began to remember several things which we had omitted from our list of stores. I hankered after English matches and English jam! It seemed to me that this was an excellent opportunity to run into an English port to obtain those articles. Henri—my brother—laughed, but agreed that it might be well to get those matches.

So we made for Brixham near Dartmouth. We anchored outside the harbour with the idea of testing our cables, knowing that if ever we reached the Island of Desolation we should be at the mercy of those chains.

The gale was now very strong and we could see a great number of English vessels running for shelter inside the breakwater. I learnt afterwards that they were astonished to see us anchored on the wrong side of that protecting wall. They knew the danger of our position better perhaps than we did. At three o'clock in the afternoon, after our boat had been straining upon taut chains, one of the cables snapped and we swung round in a perilous way. There was but one thing to do. It would have been mad to stay outside the harbour in such a plight. We slipped the second chain, and with close-reefed sails and no jib, ran for harbour.

Crowds of people were on the jetty and we could hear them shouting to us as though we were in deadly peril. Through my glasses I could see the crew of the life-boat getting ready to come to our aid. They were waiting for us to hoist a signal of distress, but we were too proud to do that, and in any case we had a strong objection to the idea of paying out all our pocket-money in salvage

fees. My brother and I both agreed that we could do very well without the life-boat.

As a matter of fact we did very badly, and we could not altogether escape the enthusiastic desire of the Brixham life-boat men to rescue us, willy-nilly. When we ran with the wind at a great pace past the breakwater we found the harbour crowded with boats and we plunged into the midst of them. The fishermen were shouting and swearing, and it was a scene of terrific confusion in a howling gale which plucked at the cordage of all those boats and made them sing like harp-strings. We could not drop anchor in such a hurry and, at a quick word from my brother, Bontemps sprang on to the deck of one of the boats between which we were tearing our way and made fast with a strong rope.

Then the life-boat crew could not be restrained. Doubtless they had been disappointed that we had not signalled to them for help, but their habit of saving life was strong upon them and they could not

miss such an heroic opportunity, though rather late in the day. It was not our lives they desired to save but those of their compatriots. They sprang on board to make the line fast, and moored us to a buoy where we could do no more harm.

It had all happened in a few minutes, but it was long enough to do and to suffer a lot of damage. We were in a deplorable condition after that wild race for shelter. Our top-mast, bowsprit, and main-gaff were broken, and our bulwarks had been smashed as we jammed our way between the fishing smacks.

Nor had our neighbours gone scot free. To tell the honest truth we had had no time nor room for courtesies, and we had left very ugly marks upon the hulls of several English boats. When we stopped our mad career my brother and I looked at each other ruefully and laughed—on the wrong side of the face. It was amusing, but not part of our programme of exploration. The wind had called the tune and we should have to pay the piper.

But we were staggered when next morning the bill was presented to us. The Brixham life-boat crew claimed £50 for assistance rendered, and several smack-owners claimed heavy sums for damage sustained.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! We had not much more than enough money in our chest to pay for the mending of our own boat, and if we had to pay in addition such heavy fines, we should be poverty-stricken.

My brother and I had several interviews with Coxswain Sanders of the Brixham life-boat. We pointed out to him that we had not called for help, that his men had boarded our boat without invitation, and that we had never been in the slightest danger. Of course we desired to make a donation to each member of the crew in recognition of their friendliness, but £50 was in our opinion altogether beyond the mark.

Mr. Sanders was a splendid fellow, as honest as the day is long, and most polite. But he told us in his quiet way that £50

was according to the usual scale of salvage service and that £50 we should have to pay.

This wretched business kept us no less than twenty days in Brixham. Here we were kicking our heels about in a little English port when we ought to have been a thousand miles at least on our way to the desert island. It was exasperating and humiliating.

By a curious chance it was Dr. Charcot's sister who came to our rescue. This lady, who was in England at the time, happened to read in a west-country paper an article entitled 'French Sailors' Peril.' Being a quick-witted woman and a very kind one, she instantly went to work to extricate us from our difficulty. She took the advice of a lawyer in London and wired to us 'Don't pay.' From our French Consul in Dartmouth, Mr. Collins, we had similar advice, upon which we acted in our negotiations with the Royal National Life-Boat Institution, who had now taken the matter in hand. They telegraphed to us 'Pay £40,' then 'Pay £30.'



Then they issued their ultimatum : ' Pay £20 or go into court.' Naturally we did not want to go into court. It would have wasted time, it would have cost more money, and it would have made us look still more ridiculous when the case was reported in the French papers.

So we accepted the compromise, and paid up the sum agreed to the life-boat crew, and another £100 for damages to boats. It had been a most expensive holiday at this English seaside resort ! Indeed we had felt like prisoners of war bargaining for our ransom. The only advantage we gained from our stay in Brixham was the acquisition of those English matches and of that English jam for which I had expressed a wish, and some very pleasant conversation with our friends the enemy. Coxswain Sanders and his crew made us presents of fish and extended many courtesies to us (after we had paid the money), and we parted with them on the best of terms.

I must not forget to mention, however, that before leaving we obtained a new mem-

ber of our crew—Larose. We were in need of another man, and there was a French brig in Brixham, whose captain we visited with the request that he might spare us one of his hands. He mentioned Larose at once. He told us that this youth was admirably honest, wonderfully strong, very brave and very useful in every possible way. Such an accumulation of virtues made us a little suspicious. It seemed to us strange that the captain should be willing and almost eager to part with such a jewel. I mentioned that point. ‘But, captain,’ I said, ‘how is it that you care to spare him to us?’

‘Oh, that is very simple,’ said the captain; ‘he eats too much.’

My brother and I laughed very heartily. We had no desire to keep our crew on short rations, and we were quite prepared to let Larose satisfy his appetite. Little however did we know at that time the vastness of the appetite which we took on board with our new comrade! We had much to learn in this respect.

It was on the 6th of November that we got away from Brixham. The weather was in our favour now, and with a good north-west wind and all sails set we ran swiftly to Madeira. We stayed there five days, having a very enjoyable time on that beautiful little island, where we took in fresh water and fruit.

One night my brother had a misadventure which for a moment or two endangered his life and revealed a new point in Larose's character. He was rowed on shore by this young seaman, and in landing upon the quay steps in the darkness he slipped and fell into the water. Fortunately he was able to scramble out, but not with any help from Larose.

That simple fellow had no desire to see my brother drown before his eyes, but his thoughts moved slowly, and his sense of politeness was more remarkable than his activity. He could not bring himself to grab the arm of his superior officer. He leant over his boat and said very quietly and courteously, 'Captain, shall I give you my

hand?' My brother would certainly have gone to what the English sailors call Davy Jones's locker, if he had depended upon the exertions of Larose!

We had excellent weather with us when we left Madeira and steered a south-westerly course across the South Atlantic. It was a joy to us to find how well the *J. B. Charcot* made headway when all her sails were set, and we soon became full of affection for this trim little boat which was to be our home for the next two years.

Naturally we were in close quarters. There was no superfluous room on or below deck, and every inch of space was occupied. We had only one cabin, and my brother and I shared it for sleeping and eating with the men. It was about eight feet long, and when all six men were at table each of us had to be careful about our elbows. There were six bunks in this cabin, three on each side, and those were the only places on the ship which a man might claim as his own, and where he might keep his private property.

Those private belongings of the crew did not amount to much, but like all sailors they had their little treasures—old letters from home, family photographs, a few knick-knacks given to them by their sweethearts or friends, a picture or two cut from a French paper, a tobacco-pouch, a jack-knife, a steel watch, and such like.

My brother and I had our own treasures, and we had decorated the cabin in a way that pleased our eyes and reminded us of friends at home. A framed portrait of Dr. Charcot, the 'presiding genius' of our expedition, hung on a bulkhead, and the inscription which he had written across it was good to read :

'Aux officiers et à l'équipage du gibet *Charcot* souhaits sincères de réussite. Charcot.' (To the officers and crew of the ketch *Charcot* sincere wishes for success.)

In that cabin my brother and I spent many hours through the days and weeks and years of our voyage, poring over charts, consulting each other upon difficulties present or ahead, talking of old times when we were boys

together, reading old books when we were not on watch, and when we were surrounded by the loneliness of the Island of Desolation; leaning with our elbows on the table and our faces in our hands, silent perhaps, but thinking of all those anxieties, hopes, disappointments, and dangers which we had to face; sometimes ill, sometimes very dejected, often very weary. It is strange what a world of thought may be contained within such narrow walls! This cabin was the parlour of our life in which we found society, recreation, amusement and rest.

It was also our library. My brother and I are both fond of reading, and I remember that among the books I took was a set of Rudyard Kipling's works translated into French by the Vicomte Robert d'Humières. They were a source of immense pleasure to me, and many times I marvelled at the knowledge of sea life and of the animal world, so intimate and so accurate, displayed by this English master of prose and verse. The *Jungle Book* was a source of continual enter-

tainment, and I was charmed especially by such tales as the 'White Seal.'

I think I may say without exaggeration that I know a good deal about seals and sea-elephants. I have had many Homeric combats with them. For months they were our only companions in the Island of Desolation. But Rudyard Kipling knows as much as I do, and has told what he knows in a way which I cannot emulate.

Before leaving France I had come across my chest of school-books which had never been opened since I left the Jesuit college where I had been educated. The idea came to me that it would be amusing to take them on board the *J. B. Charcot*, and browse again over the leaves of those old class-books which as a boy I had hated so much, but now remembered with affection. I took the chest with me, and for many nights at sea when I sat alone in the little cabin, while my brother was keeping the watch on deck, I read, by the dim light of an oil lamp, my copies of Horace and Virgil, so that many familiar lines



of those old masters now come singing through my brain.

And at Kerguelen I took my Horace with me on many a solitary expedition into the interior; and in places where no human foot-steps had ever trodden before, where great grim rocks frowned above me, and where beyond no keel furrowed the grey and desolate sea, I sat alone with the Latin poet, reciting sometimes aloud his polished lines, enchanted by the melody of the verse and by his vivid word pictures. It was the first time I had ever enjoyed my textbooks, and I went to school again in the Island of Desolation.

Now that we are out on the broad waters of the South Atlantic 'rolling down to Rio,' it will be well for me to give the reader some idea of our daily life on board, and of the men who were making this adventure.

We kept strict discipline. The smallness of our boat and crew made that even more necessary than if we had been on a great sailing ship. The watches were kept day and

night from Boulogne to Melbourne. There were always three on deck—one at the helm, one at the look-out, and the officer of the watch. My brother and I took it in turns to be on deck, and as a rule my brother had Bon-temps the boatswain and Esnault the cook to keep watch with him, while I had Agnès and Larose. As in the English navy we had two dog-watches (from 4 P.M. to 6 P.M. and from 6 P.M. to 8 P.M.), so that the men who had only four hours' rest one night might have eight hours the next, turn and turn about.

As soon as daylight came, the men who had been sleeping would get out of their bunks for morning coffee and biscuits prepared by Esnault, and it was then that we heard the noise which became so familiar to us, and so alarming, in spite of being familiar, as the months passed. It was the noise of Larose eating ship's biscuits!

The other men would be satisfied with one or two. Larose was never satisfied with less than seven or eight. Steadily as a machine his teeth would get to work, grinding, grind-

ing at those big hard biscuits, so that when we heard him at work, in the Atlantic or Indian Oceans, or in the bays of Kerguelen, my brother and I used to say, 'There goes the biscuit mill ! Time to get up.'

At meals, which we used to take as a rule at midday and at six o'clock in the evening, Larose used to eat as much as all the rest of us put together. It was really no joke, you understand ! Henri and I were terrified at the sight of such voracity. We had provisioned our ship for two years, but without reckoning such a monstrous appetite as this ! It was an awful thought that our store of biscuits would give out if Larose had his way with them. Yet we never had the heart to check him, and to ask him to tighten his belt would have been sheer cruelty.

He had a peculiar way of eating. He would seldom look at what he put into his mouth, but would ladle in the soup, or do spade-work with his knife and fork in a dreamy way, with a far-away look of mysticism in his eyes, and with a spiritual expres-

sion on his face, as though he were indifferent to such a material thing as food.

He had come on board, not exactly thin, but certainly not fat. Before a month had passed he swelled visibly. His cheeks became puffed out, his clothes were bursting. Buttons jumped from him at meal-times. Before another month had gone he could no longer get into his trousers, and a new pair had to be made for him out of sail-cloth. My brother Henri used to watch him with increasing terror, and although we laughed a good deal also, it was impossible to get rid of the haunting thought that Larose would eat his way through the ship's stores before we had got to Kerguelen and its seals. Believe me, I do not exaggerate the devouring appetite of this simple soul, whom I remember with affection.

After meal-times, and when there was no work in hand (though we were not idle), the men preferred to slip away from the cabin to a little cubby hole where they played cards for hours together, or sat smoking and chat-

ting in their slow way. For sailors are not glib of speech. Bontemps and Agnès were the two great smokers. The boatswain was never happy unless he were chewing a quid or sucking a pipe. It was his one joy in life, and if robbed of that, he became morose and miserable. Agnès also was a slave to tobacco. My brother and I were free from that desire. I never smoke on sea or ashore, and Henri, curiously enough, and contrary to the usual custom of sailors, only smokes when he is on land.

Agnès, as I have said, was our musician. In his spare time he used to get out his accordion and, either in the hole amidships or up on deck, he used to play the plaintive tunes of his native Normandy, and sing the old folk-songs, or amuse his comrades with the gay little chansons of the boulevards and café concerts. Often I have seen him leaning against the bulwarks in the stern of the *J. B. Charcot*, a tall, strong figure with dreamy blue eyes, and the wind tossing his fair hair, as we scudded along in a good

breeze, and above the sound of the wind thrilling through our rigging, and the murmuring voices of the sea and the cry of the sea-birds, came the sweet clear voice of Agnès, faintly as it was carried away on the passing gusts into the eternal solitude. I think he found a good deal of quiet joy, poor lad, in that gift of song and music.

Esnault the cook was nearly always busy in his galley on deck, for when one meal was finished another had to be prepared—and there was always Larose to think of.

Esnault would not have qualified as chef at any Hotel Métropole. His methods were primitive and he had no prejudices. There is an old English proverb, I believe, which says every man must eat a peck of dirt before he dies. Having voyaged with Esnault, I have fulfilled my obligations in that respect.

He had a passion for breaking things, or at least a fatal knack, and I am almost driven to the belief that he used to eat his cloths. At least they disappeared in a miraculous

manner, for whereas we started out with a full stock of the most elegant dish-cloths, they had vanished by the time we had reached Madeira, and he was reduced to using oakum to wipe up the plates and dishes. Presently, however, he saved himself some of this labour, for there were few plates and dishes that remained safe and sound.

Even our big casserole or stewing-pot was not proof against him, and he knocked a hole in it. It was his habit to conceal these breakages, and then, when taxed with them, he would say, with an air of innocent surprise, 'Oh, but that was broken a long time ago, Captain.' It was certainly a long time before we discovered the loss of our coffee-roaster, in which, under heavy pains and penalties, Esnault was required to roast our beans each morning. We found out afterwards that this machine had had a fatal accident, and that our beans were cooked in the ordinary frying-pan.

I have a robust stomach, and imagination is not my strongest quality, but I used to



avoid going within a respectable distance of the cook's galley before, and for a little while after, meal-time. But, after all, Esnault was a good fellow, and did his duty faithfully, according to his light. He was an orphan, and, as I have told you, only sixteen years of age. One could not be hard on him. I think, in some previous experiences, he had been ill-used, for during the first few weeks, whenever my brother spoke to him, up would go his elbow with an involuntary gesture as though to shield himself from a blow. Of my brother he stood in wholesome fear, though there was no reason for that. Curiously enough he did not care two *sous* for me, and would simply laugh when I suggested certain things to him in the way of culinary reform.

Jean Bontemps was our handy-man, a 'salt' in every drop of his blood, and very wise with the wisdom of the sea. His senses were so tuned to the wind that he felt an approaching storm, or calm, in his marrow-bones, and he could do all the practical work

of seamanship, such as sail-making or mending, or the odd jobs of carpentry, with expert skill. But, although obedient to command, he had a dogged way with him, and had a stolid dislike to any 'new-fangled' methods of handling a ship, or doing the work in a ship.

'Pardon me, Captain,' he would say, 'but I have never seen a job done in that style before, and I have been thirty years at sea.'

And I would answer him, 'Bontemps, *mon ami*, before you are many months older your eyes will be opened to many things you have never seen before. You'll have to get used to these little surprises, you know.'

Whereat he would shake his head and go away to brood over the matter.

I have forgotten to mention two other members of the crew not on the ship's list, but sharing our rations and our adventures. One was Patrick the dog, the other was Puss-in-Boots, a black cat with one eye.

Patrick had a history. He had sailed with my brother on a long voyage, but at Queens-

town, where my brother's ship put in for a while, it was impossible to take the dog ashore on account of the English quarantine regulations. Reluctantly, therefore, Henri handed him over to a French fishing boat off Queenstown, in which Patrick was taken to Boulogne. For a year, perhaps, my brother lost sight of his faithful friend, but when I was on my quest for a boat in Boulogne, Henri suggested that I should try to get Patrick back again. By good luck I found the dog, and he was delighted beyond measure to find himself afloat again with his former master.

Patrick was a fine fellow with much natural *gaieté de cœur*, and he helped to keep things cheerful on board, sharing our watches and keeping a sharp look-out on his own account. It was always Patrick who first caught sight of the porpoises at sea, and he would bark furiously to announce his discovery. Then, too, when we hauled in fish—and we always trailed a line astern—he became excited to the point of madness when he saw the gleam-

ing white bodies of our victims, and would race up and down the deck, and then stand, quivering in every limb, with his ears cocked up, and his nose over the bulwark, to see them taken on board.

What shall I say further about our passage to Rio? To a landsman it would seem devoid of incident and interest. He would wonder how six men could live mewed up in a small boat like the *J. B. Charcot*, day after day, night after night, with nothing to do (so he would think!), without beginning to quarrel, and without hating each other—and going melancholy mad!

A sailor will smile at such a gloomy picture. To a seaman there is continual interest in the sea that seems so monotonous to the landsman, plenty of work to do in the ship, and a world of thought to keep his brain busy. By day and night the navigating officer had to make his observations to be entered each day in the log, and we were always reading the wind and weather with as much interest as a man

ashore will keep his nose between the leaves of an exciting novel. The good breeze that was taking our small craft at a spanking rate across the great desert, where the waters were furrowed only by our lone keel, whipped the blood to our hearts, for it was good to know that we were making up lost time in such a gallant style.

It was good to stand at the helm and feel the throb of the boat in our grip as she met each rolling wave and took it like a sea-gull. The soul of the ship speaks to one. The man at the helm has a long conversation with her, and she has many things to tell. One knows when she is distressed, when she is moody and wayward. One shares her joyfulness when she springs forward lightly and fleetly with the wind singing through her sails. Other voices speak to the seaman. The main-mast and the mizzen-mast and the bowsprit are living things. One sees how their strength is tried, how they quiver as the sails tug at them, how they thrill when all canvas is spread and

the boat goes on a long chase, how every fibre of them is strained when the invisible arms of the storm winds try to tear them down or smash them into matchwood.

The seaman's eye watches each rope and pulley and boom and spar. He knows the strength of them and the weakness. And around him all the time are the great waters and the great sky, talking to him also all the time, through the day and night, and the changing weather and the changing light. The stars are his friendly beacons; the sun is his watch and guide. The wind is never out of his thoughts; sometimes it caresses him and sometimes it threatens him; and in the whimper or the wail of it he knows there is danger or distress.

So it has always been with me, though I put it down in poor words. We do not speak of these things. It is the first time that I have uttered them, and they seem a little foolish now that they are written. No doubt a writing man would find much to tell about the beauty of the sea. We take all that for

granted, and yet I think we feel it. I should like to tell of the great sunsets which fired the sky when we plunged southward and westward, of those colours, too rich and too deep for words, which flared up as the sun sank down and paved our way with gold and crimson and rose pink, and emerald and amethyst and topaz and a thousand flower tints. Then the sky was a divinely wonderful ocean of beauty across which there sailed fairy ships with golden sails spread, and birds of paradise with magic wings of colour, and enchanted islands with mountains of precious gems and flame-tipped peaks.

I should like to describe some of these nights when I was officer of the watch pacing the deck, when the dark figure of Larose stood forward in the bows and when Agnès stood at the helm. I suppose some men would make poetry of these nights, and write them down in music. I can do nothing but say that the whole world of waters around us was flooded with a silver light and that our keel left behind a long wake of flashing



phosphorescence, where every one of those myriads of animalculæ lit its tiny lamp and glowed with all the brightness of its little soul. That is but feeble, poverty-stricken language, and I pray you not to laugh at a seaman who has gone beyond his depths!

We saw but few ships on the voyage. For many days together we seemed to be alone in the South Atlantic. But after we had crossed the line we passed near a big sailing-ship called the *Australia*. I suppose a landsman can hardly understand the excitement that comes to one on a long voyage when one gets within hail of another vessel. In a little while the two ships will have passed and disappeared beyond each other's ken, but during the time when the sails are within sight there is a sense of companionship which is comforting, and though our words do not carry from one deck to another, we have conversation and are sociable.

We hailed the *Australia*, and knowing that the first question asked by every ship is, 'How far from your last port?' we got our

answer ready, and in big white letters painted on a board, showed the words 'twenty-eight days from Start Point.' We waited for the answering news which would tell us how near we were to Rio, if the wind held in our favour. But we saw the captain throw up his hands with a gesture of amazement and, perhaps, of incredulity, and he gave us no message. I think he believed we were 'drawing the long bow' at him, for truth to tell we had had luck with us all the way, and for a small boat like ours it was something like a record run.

We did not make Rio, however, so quickly as we had hoped, for a calm made our sails hang limp for two days, and there was not a breath of wind to carry us into port.

It was vexatious to lie outside in that listless way, for I need hardly say that we were eager to stretch our legs a little, and to get into that fair harbour where the gaiety of civilised life in the white city beyond would be a very pleasant change to the long spell we had had on the *J. B. Charcot* since we

left Madeira. At last we whistled up a breeze and ran right ahead into anchorage.

Here all my pleasure was spoilt for a little while by a foolish accident. I was looking to the sails which the men were lowering, and had my hand, through sheer carelessness, on the cogwheel of the winch. Suddenly the cable chains tightened as the boat dragged upon them, and when the winch turned my hand was caught by the teeth of the cogwheel. It was quite dark, so that neither my brother nor the sailors saw what was the matter with me when I cried out. I had to explain, and shout to them to turn the wheel the other way. When my hand was released I found that the flesh was torn into strips. I bound it up as best I could, and next day went ashore and showed my wounds to a French doctor, who stitched them up very skilfully. But it was a long time before my hand healed, and I shall bear the scar as long as I live.

We were twelve days at Rio and took on board more water and fresh fruit. By good

luck and the generosity of good friends we escaped all harbour dues, which otherwise would have been a heavy tax upon us. The French Consul to whom we paid our respects and told our story went to the Chief Customs Officer of Rio, and when he told him the character and object of our voyage, he was kind enough to waive all fees. Although we had a good time at Rio, we slept every night on board in our close little cabin, and it was here that we enjoyed our Christmas dinner, which was made very happy by the receipt of letters from home, the last we could hope to get for eighteen months or more.

In honour of the day my brother Henri, who is a first-class cook, relieved Esnault of some of his duties—there were painful discoveries in the galley!—and made a pudding which was not only enjoyable at the time, but a delightful memory. Larose was in the seventh heaven, and his eyes were more dreamy than ever when he sat in front of his second helping and smiled at the glory

of what had gone before. His only regret was that all good things come to an end.

We also cracked a good bottle of wine and drank to the success of our little venture and to the dear people at home. A few days later we said farewell to Rio de Janeiro with its hill-climbing city girdled by green forests and sheltered by great mountain ranges, with its gay people and its beautiful women and its spacious streets. We had lived very quietly on our boat, seeing the sights by day, but unknown to all the French residents, save the gallant French Consul who had saved us the harbour dues. I have been told lately by Dr. Charcot that when he passed that way a year later and spoke of the little French fishing ketch which had lain in the harbour before going on the long trail to Melbourne, the French community was astonished.

‘If only we had known!’ they said.

But, after all, we did not want to be fêted. Our work lay ahead of us and we had done nothing to talk about. It was on the 1st

of January 1908 that we sailed out of the harbour of Rio between the two great headlands and past the Sugar Loaf, and from that date our luck changed. It was not long before the *J. B. Charcot* was put to a severe test.

## CHAPTER III

‘From our shrouds

We view a rising land, like distant clouds ;  
The mountain-tops confirm the pleasing sight  
And curling smoke ascending from their height.  
The canvas falls ; their oars the sailors ply ;  
From the rude strokes the whirling waters fly.’

VIRGIL.

ONE morning after we had left Rio I said to Bontemps the boatswain :

‘It is a strange thing, my friend, but there does not seem to be a single rat on this ship.’

I saw a curious, frightened look creep into the eyes of that sturdy seaman.

‘No,’ he said in a most mournful way. ‘No, Captain, that is very unlucky for us. I am sore afraid we have seen the last of our good fortune.’

I knew what was passing through his mind. That rats leave a sinking ship is a proverb in all language of the sea, and



because we had no rats on board, Bontemps believed that we were doomed. I laughed at him, and called him a superstitious old rogue, but he was not to be teased into cheerfulness, and he went about his work moodily and muttering dismal forebodings.

Then a little tragedy happened which I am sure confirmed his belief in our unlucky destiny. I have mentioned our black one-eyed cat. A black cat on board is supposed to charm away the evil spirits that call a ship to destruction, and all had gone well, or pretty well, as long as Puss-in-Boots patrolled the deck or climbed on to the boom to make faces at the sea-birds, or sat in the bows like a little black figure-head. But soon after we had left Rio the cat had a fatal accident. It was playing up on one of the rails, when it suddenly conceived the idea of jumping to the deck. It sprang, but too far out, and dropped into the sea, where it was quickly drowned before we could even attempt a rescue.

To Bontemps it seemed like the last nail

in our coffin, and he was not at all surprised when we were overtaken by a terrific storm. We took most of our canvas down and lay to, drifting out of our course with bare sticks. The sea was mountains high, and as those great rolling waves came tearing towards us, the little *J. B. Charcot* plunged down into deep valleys, and then surged up again and was shaken like a rat on the summits of those water-mountains before lurching forward again into the depths.

It was at midnight, just as I was going off watch when the storm began, and it blew for twenty-four hours. The wind came raging at us as though invisible monsters were seeking to devour us. One could hear each gust coming with a loud booming, and as it caught us each rope was lashed like a whip and the furies shrieked about the ship. The little *J. B. Charcot* was quivering and trembling. Each timber was strained as she staggered and lurched and plunged, buffeted on port side and starboard by a wind that came all ways at once.

It was not an ordinary storm but a cyclone sweeping round in a circle of hundreds of miles in circumference. Then suddenly, at ten o'clock on the following night, the wind died down. After the wild tumult we were in a dead calm. We stood in the heart of the cyclone, in the calm centre of a hurricane which was still whirling around miles away. It was indeed the strangest, most uncanny thing to be becalmed in the middle of that cyclone, to see the ropes run slack, and the canvas hang limp, and to feel hardly a breath of wind upon our faces. We had not been able to hear our own voices in the gale, but now, when we spoke, our words startled our own ears, and a profound silence brooded around us.

It is the ominous silence that haunts one with superstitious fears. Even Patrick seemed to be scared at the mystery of it, and listened intently with pricked ears, and whined as he sniffed over the bulwarks and stared into the darkness. This dead calm lasted until 4 A.M. Then a buffet of wind

smacked us with a staggering blow, and the silence was broken by the low dull roar of the advancing storm, and our small ship seemed to groan and shudder with pitiful terror. We had left the calm centre of the cyclone and the fury was upon us again.

For five days the storm raged and we shipped heavy seas, and there were moments when death seemed very close to us. But the *J. B. Charcot* was a good boat. Her courage and strength were tried and proved. My brother and I were proud of her. I was a little proud of myself, for my choice of that old hull lying dry-beached in Boulogne had been a sound one. She leaked a little but not much, and though we pumped at every watch we did not discover much water in the hold. Oak-built by good shipwrights, the timbers of this fishing ketch were sturdy and strong and seaworthy. My anxiety during those days and nights of storm was rewarded by the consoling knowledge that the *J. B. Charcot* had come through without damage and without shak-

ing our confidence in the prospects of landing with dry clothes on the Island of Desolation. We should not have to swim to those uninhabited rocks!

After the storm we rode, on a buoyant keel, over the great blue sea, with our wings full spread and soaring forwards like a homing bird. We were bound for Tristan da Cunha, our last resting-place on the road to Kerguelen, six thousand miles further on the trail.

Twenty days from Rio we sighted the three islands of that lonely group out in the South Atlantic, and saw rising clear into the blue sky the snow-capped summit of that extinct volcano which soars 7640 feet above the cliffs and the green slopes of the grass-grown plateau.

When the *J. B. Charcot* neared these islands we first tried to effect a landing on the one called Inaccessible. We launched one of our light flat-bottomed boats and pulled towards shore, but seeing the surf beating on the narrow beach at the foot of

a huge cliff, and having no mind to smash our craft and to lose our lives on such a coast, we returned to our ship.

By this time we had been seen by the people of Tristan, and several men, belonging to that farthest and loneliest outpost of the great British Empire, came out to greet us in two canvas boats.

The sea was too heavy for them to come aboard, but as they passed close alongside one of them called out in English of a strange dialect, as it seemed to my brother, that we should do well to put out further from the coast for the night. I knew enough of dirty weather on a lee shore to appreciate the value of his advice. Then, since conversation between us and the men in the tossing boats was difficult, we let over in a bottle a message for the people with whom we hoped to make friends, and having seen them pick it up, stood out to sea.

We were in need of fresh meat and green stuff to enliven our daily menu of preserved food, and it seemed to us that the people of

Tristan da Cunha would be glad to make a fair exchange for articles for which they also must be yearning. In our bottle-message, therefore, we gave a list of the things we were willing to let them have, articles which in a village without shops and beyond the reach of parcels post they could only get from visiting vessels—such as gunpowder, salt, sugar and tea,—and asked them to let us have in exchange sheep, poultry, potatoes, and other produce which we knew from our books were obtainable on the island.

We were not entirely ignorant of Tristan and its people and its ways, for during our passage we had studied one or two Blue-books giving reports from ships that had touched at the island, and this had aroused great curiosity in us to meet this little colony of voluntary Robinson Crusoes, who seem to be as happy as the day is long on a rock which affords them none of those amusements, luxuries, and comforts of life which seem so necessary to civilised men and women. We were eager to make acquaint-



ance with them, to see the houses they had built up, to know how they worked and lived, and to study the characteristics of families who were bound together by close kinship in a commonwealth without distinction of class or property.

As I have said, we stood out to sea for the night. Next day we found ourselves becalmed almost out of sight of land. There we lay all day, and our patience was severely taxed. Henri and I were looking forward to getting new knowledge of strange people. But other members of the crew were prompted by different motives.

When Larose heard of the message enclosed in the bottle, our request for sheep and poultry seemed to him the most reasonable thing we had done for many a long day. He thoroughly approved of this method of barter, and would, I am sure, have given away all our ship's tools in return for a nice plump sheep or a well-fed duck. The vision of such things made his mouth water, for he had the explorer's instinct, and was devoted

to the acquisition of new experiences in the nature of food.

Agnès practised a few tunes on his accordion in order to do himself justice before a greater audience than he could find on ship-board.

Esnault the cook liked the notion of stretching his legs outside his galley, though he anticipated heavier work when the live-stock was brought on board.

Only Bontemps accepted the situation philosophically, as an old sailor who has nothing more to see and to admire in this world so wide, and to whom the enforced idleness of a calm is part of the day's work. In any case it was doubtful whether there was a tobacconist's shop in Tristan, so what use had the island for him?

It was not until the following morning that a breeze sprang up which enabled us to again stand in towards the island. Putting an empty cask into our biggest boat so that I might get a fresh supply of water, I was rowed ashore by Agnès and Larose.

As I went near I could see that the inhabited and cultivated portion of the island was a strip of land at the north-west corner, eight or nine miles long and of an average width of one and a half miles, formed, as I found afterwards, by an overflow of lava from the crater lips. This is really the only part of the island of any use to mankind. The rest of it, twenty-one miles round, is grim and barren and rugged. There is no harbour, but a broad belt of seaweed growing off the shore at a distance of about two miles serves in a measure as a natural breakwater. The landing-place is near a cascade which tumbles down that side of the cliff and rushes across the shingly beach in white foam. On the top of the line of low cliffs I could see grassy meadow-lands, very cool and green to the eye, with a cluster of cottages, and beyond mountain slopes, leading the vision to the high conical peak which is the centre of the island.

While I had been taking in these details we had neared the beach and saw that twenty

men had gathered there to drag in our boat as it was washed ashore by the dangerous breakers.

They were a curious-looking crowd, rough and picturesque, but as regards their clothes not unlike the fisher-folk of my own native Brittany. Most of them wore blue cotton jackets and trousers, obtained, it seemed, from American whalers. On their feet they wore rough moccasins made from bullock-skin, and among the first things they asked for were any old leather shoes that we could spare. They gave us a hearty welcome when we jumped out of the boats, and although at that time I spoke very little English, we had no difficulty in getting on excellent terms with each other. They wrung me repeatedly by the hand, as though it were a delight to them to see a fresh face. They asked me where I had come from, and were fairly amazed when they heard that we had voyaged so many thousand miles since leaving Brixham Harbour in England.

‘In that little boat?’ they cried. ‘How is

it that you were not shipwrecked? We would not trust ourselves upon such a tiny thing.'

Larose and Agnès were greeted by them with equal cordiality, although those two knew no more English than 'Yes' and 'All right!'

I could see no real sign of physical degeneration and none of mental decadence among these men, in spite of the absolute necessity among them of intermarrying to a degree which in civilised lands would be regarded as highly dangerous. It is true that some of them were of small stature and rather thin, but even these appeared wiry and active. One man among them was distinguished by a really fine physique. He stood up tall and broad, and carried himself with an outward air of dignity and almost of command. It seemed to me, by the way in which the others behaved to him and by the authoritative way in which he spoke to us on the subject of barter and exchange, that he was in the position of chief. In-

deed I asked who was the chief but they said they had none, for all were equal.

The man introduced himself, however, by the name of Andreas Ripetto, and asked whether I would go to his house and take a little meal with his wife and family.

I was, of course, delighted to accept this invitation, and on the way up from the landing-place my new friend told me that he had been shipwrecked on Tristan from the *Italia* about fourteen years ago. He was a Genoese by birth, and with a fellow-shipmate, Gaetano Landrello, he had been cast ashore. He had decided at once that this island was to be his home, not because it was the most attractive spot in the world, but because it was dry land and could not very well be wrecked. Other ships had touched the island since he had been domiciled there, and he had had an opportunity of getting away. But he had declined all such offers. Never again, he said, would he put foot upon the deck of a vessel after one deliverance from death by drowning!

This seemed to me strange, for the man told me that he had served on an Italian man-of-war in his youth, and I could not understand that a sailor by profession should have such a dread of the sea.

‘I am now a married man,’ he said, ‘and speak English, as you will see, almost like my native tongue. My wife is a good woman, like all of them here, and I am very happy as the father of a very fine family. After all, what more does a man want? I have my little home. There is enough to eat, the sky is above my head, and the good God is in His heaven, as close to us here as in my native Genoa.’

As a sailor myself it seemed to me pitiful, and indeed incredible, that a fine man like this, trained to the sea, should moulder his life away on a barren rock when he might be following the free and open life which to my mind is the best in the world. *Chacun à son goût!*

All the men who had helped to drag us through the surf were following behind, and



I heard their laughter as they spoke incomprehensible words to my two comrades. Our arrival had brought other inhabitants down from their cottages to gaze at us. Among them were many women and children. The little ones were pretty and fairy-like in clean, white calico frocks, with white woollen stockings and small calf-skin shoes, which gave them, as they danced around us, the appearance of those little novices of the *corps de ballet* of whom one sees pictures in the illustrated papers, or on the boards of a French operetta. Indeed, this impression was vivid to my mind, because the scene itself was no unfitting stage for a fairy play. The green meadow in the background, a waterfall between its leafy banks, the white surf breaking on the shore beyond, the sunlight shedding a rich golden glow upon the island, were almost unreal in its effect upon my senses.

The women were by no means unattractive, though I do not pretend to be a judge of feminine beauty. Though one or two of

them showed traces of negro blood, having slightly fuzzy hair and sallow complexions, due, as I was afterwards told, to some coloured women who had been shipped from St. Helena and the Cape to become the wives of some of the first settlers, the others were of the fair Scandinavian type, and even among those who had been 'touched with the tar-brush' there was no sign of negroid lips or other characteristics of the coloured races. Many of them had flaxen hair, oval faces, with narrow aquiline noses and rather thin, well-formed lips such as one may see in England or Denmark.

They are not exempt from the temptations of beautifying their personal appearance, which beset all daughters of Eve. They are especially fond of gay colours, and it was delightful to see how they had made use of any coloured rag which they had been able to obtain from passing or shipwrecked vessels. For instance, on their heads were cotton handkerchiefs such as sailors keep in their lockers, and here and there the blouse and

skirt, which are their usual garments, were made of the coloured striped shirts which seamen can buy in most ports.

In expression they were not exactly sad or melancholy, but their eyes had a wistful look as they gazed at us, and some of the young men and children were obviously shy and embarrassed when I happened to look their way. The children were all bright and cheerful, and their parents were obviously contented with their lot and on good terms with each other. As long as I was in the island I heard no quarrelling voices, and saw no sign of ill-temper.

As Andreas Ripetto led me up the hill, we came in sight of the little straggling group of cottages, about fifteen or sixteen in number, which are dotted about on either side of the rivulet which feeds the cascade. I noticed that they were built of a soft stone, which I was told was brought from the higher slopes of the mountain—an arduous labour. They were built more or less on the same plan—one story high under a thatched roof, and

about 30 feet long by 10 broad. Attached to each house was a pen enclosed by a stone wall, in which the people kept their sheep, calves, and other live stock. Most of them also had small outhouses for lumber. I was pleased to see that they were of a cleanly disposition, and that no unsightly or evil-smelling heaps of refuse were allowed near the dwelling-places. It amused me to notice the pigs roaming about in a free-and-easy way. Of these beasts, said Ripetto, there were about forty on the island.

Outside one of the cottages was a wagon drawn by two yoked oxen. It was a small, roughly built affair on solid wheels, and it had been brought out to carry up from the shore any stores we might be in a position to offer.

It seemed to me at first that there was a flower garden in front of each cottage, but looking over the wall I saw that nothing grew but long tussock grass.

‘What on earth do you grow that for here?’ I asked, and Ripetto told me that it

was cultivated for the purpose of repairing their thatched roofs. I am bound to say the thatch was rather primitive, and tufts of long grass grew out of it.

Ripetto welcomed us across his threshold, and introduced me into the bosom of his family. Mrs. Ripetto was a buxom lady anxious to feed me, welcome me, and make me thoroughly at home, and his brood of children had something of an Italian look, although they spoke the English tongue. There were two rooms in this small house, and most of the woodwork had been obtained from ships wrecked on the rocky coast. I observed, for example, a piece of wood from a ship's stern in one of the rooms, and I could clearly read the name *Mabel Clarke*.

Ripetto, following my glance, answered my unspoken question :

‘That is a bit of an American boat, which went to pieces here in ’77.’ She was bound from Liverpool to Hong-Kong with coal when she struck on our rocks, and two people were drowned before we went out to

the rescue of the crew. It was a hard struggle to get out through the heavy breakers, but they brought off the survivors, and, at a good deal of sacrifice to themselves, fed and housed them until October in the following year. Naturally this was a big strain on the resources of the island, for as a rule it is as much as we can do to keep our own souls and bodies together. Finally an American man-of-war, the *Essex*, called and took them away. Then in February 1880 the English man-of-war *Comus* brought our people, from the Yankee Government, a good many useful presents as a reward for what had been done. A few months later another English vessel, the *Miranda*, brought to our old friend, William Green, a medal from the Shipwrecked Mariners Society. He was proud of it, I can tell you! It is not often the outside world takes such an interest in Tristan. It did us a bit of good too. One of my first memories is *H.M.S. Raleigh* bringing £100 worth of stores to the island in August '94 as a present from the Britishers.

It was to recognise the services of the Tristan folk when the *Allen Shaw* was wrecked in March of the year before.'

Ripetto had a good memory for the few historical events that Tristan had ever known.

I had brought a bottle of wine and some cakes along with me as a little offering of courtesy to my hosts. They were immensely pleased, and were happy to give me tea. A little fuss took place which I noticed with quiet amusement. Some one left the cottage, and Ripetto, in his simple way, told me that they had sent to borrow the only bread recently baked in the island, which belonged to the parson and his wife.

I had a long conversation with my new friend in rather halting English, eked out by a little French, of which Ripetto had a small vocabulary, and I asked him several questions about the way of life in Tristan.

Their chief hardship is the getting of wood from the distant hills, as they have already cut down all those stunted trees which grew



near their settlement. The wood has to be gathered six miles from their homes, rolled down the mountains, and loaded on to the bullock wagons. I formed the impression that one of these days they will have to leave the island altogether for lack of fuel. I remember that one of my questions was 'Do you ever quarrel?' Ripetto laughed and said, 'The men never; we live like brothers. But women, of course, will have their little tiffs.'

We spent some days in Tristan, during which time I learnt a good deal about the island and its little population, and made friends with the clergyman and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Barrow, who were charming people and most kind and hospitable. Larose had already picked up an acquaintance with them, for while I had been taking tea with the Ripettos he had by some means or other found his way to that abode, where he enjoyed himself vastly. I think my first meal in the clergyman's home deserves to be put on record, for it is one of my delightful memories.

The following is the menu :—

Leg of mutton

Potatoes

Limejuice

Tea.

The Hotel Métropole of any capital in Europe could not have provided a banquet which would have given more satisfaction than this modest meal after my long spell on ship's victuals.

Mr. Barrow told me that he had come to the island as a kind of pious pilgrimage. He had often heard of the generous and kindly way in which the islanders had devoted themselves to the care of shipwrecked men and women, and he determined to go to them and live among them in order that he might be their teacher and give them Christian ministrations. From this good clergyman I obtained a great deal of interesting information about the history of Tristan and the life of the islanders, which amplified what I had already learnt from the reports of British seamen.

The Tristan da Cunha islands are part of a long submarine range which divides the floor of the Atlantic Ocean. This range, or ridge, is studded with volcanoes. Those of Tristan, St. Helena, Ascension and St. Paul have been extinct for thousands of years, while Teneriffe and the Azores are slumbering, and those in Iceland still in an active state.

The Tristan group seems to have been discovered early in the sixteenth century by the gallant Portuguese navigators, and the first mention of them, as far as we know, was in a letter dated August 1506 from Pedro Coresmo to the King of Portugal, in which he says that he has gone to Mozambique to wait for his friend Tristao de Cunha. In other Portuguese works the name is spelt Tristan da Cunha, so that I suppose this is the correct spelling of the island, and not Tristan d'Acunha as it is often written. It is interesting to me to know that the first man to land on Tristan was a Frenchman named D'Etchevery, in a boat called *L'Étoile du Matin* (The Morning Star) in 1767. Seven

years before, however, an English seaman named Captain Gamaliel Nightingale visited Nightingale Island, to which he gave his own name.

Some seal-hunters, in a boat called the *Industry*, with Captain John Patten, were the first human beings to inhabit Tristan for a time. They landed in August 1790, and stayed there till the following April, during which time they obtained no less than five thousand seal-skins which they sold in the China market at an enormous profit.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a man named Thomas Currie landed on Tristan and lived like Robinson Crusoe (though he had no man Friday) until he was joined by a strange being called Captain Jonathan Lambert (accompanied by a man named Williams), who is described as late of Salem, of the United States of America, mariner and citizen thereof.

On the 7th of February 1811, he was pleased to constitute himself a 'Sovereign Power,' and took absolute possession of 'the

islands of Tristan da Cunha, so-called, namely the great island and the other two known by the names of Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands' solely and for his heirs for ever, 'grounding my right and claim on the rational and sure ground of absolute occupancy.' He determined that 'the said islands shall for the future be denominated the Islands of Refreshment, the great island bearing that name in particular, and the landing-place on the north to the east of the cascade' (where I had been met by Ripetto and his friends) 'to be called Reception, which shall be my place of residence.'

Captain Lambert further enlightened the world by explaining that 'the cause of the said act originated in the desire and determination of preparing myself and family a home where I can enjoy life without the embarrassments which have constantly attended me, and procure for us an interest and property by means of which a competence may be for ever secured, and remain, if possible, far removed beyond the reach of chicanery and ordinary misfortune.'

All these noble aspirations were doomed to be for ever unfulfilled, and no little Lamberts played about the 'Refreshment Islands,' for one bad day the American went out fishing with his man Williams, and never returned to what he was pleased to call his 'Sovereign International State.' Currie remained king of all he surveyed, but in May of 1815 he was joined by two men named John Tankard and John Talsen, who came off from a ship called the *Bengal Merchant*. They were of an agricultural turn of mind, and cultivated wheat and oats and sundry vegetables with success, and bred pigs from a wild stock descended from a few swine left by a passing vessel. During the American War of 1812 to 1815, the United States used Tristan as a base from which to pounce out on British sailing ships homeward bound, and it was this which first brought those islands under the official notice of the English Government.

In September 1815 they were taken over as dependencies of the Cape of Good Hope

in the name of King George the Third, and were garrisoned by a young lieutenant named Rich, in command of a lieutenant of marines, four midshipmen, and thirteen men. They kept themselves busy in their exile by work and sport, building huts, cutting down trees, fishing, and seal-hunting, until they were relieved by a detachment from the Cape of Good Hope garrison consisting of four officers, three non-commissioned officers, and thirty-four rank and file of the 21st Light Dragoons, 60th and 72nd Regiments, all under command of Captain Abraham Josias Cloete, of the 21st Light Dragoons, 'a young officer of considerable talent and acquirements, and in every respect trustworthy.'

At this time the only residents on the island, apart from the troops, were Thomas Currie and a Spaniard named Bastiano Comilla. The Englishman had no objection to the island becoming a British possession, especially as no encroachment was made on his own ground of seven acres. Captain Cloete was an energetic fellow, and built forts



to command the entrance to Falmouth Bay and Exmouth Bay, and a road leading up from the beach to his camp, which was on the site of the present settlement.

All this work was rendered futile by the decision of Lord Bathurst in 1817 to withdraw the garrison on the island. The object in stationing troops there at all was to keep a sharp lookout for any French adventurers who might attempt to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena, but the truth was that the soldiers at Tristan were about as much use for that purpose as if they had been in Piccadilly.

A few men preferred to remain when the garrison left, and these were joined by other people who landed or were wrecked upon the island. For example, in December 1820 three more were wrecked on Tristan from the *Sarah*, and in July 1821 the crew of the *Blendon Hall* were cast upon Inaccessible Island, from which they were rescued by an old corporal named Glass, who had remained with his wife and

children on the departure of the troops. In 1826 there were seven men and two children living together on this desolate island, and five coloured women were fetched from St. Helena to marry the five bachelors.

Among these early inhabitants of Tristan were the two men who have given their names to so many descendants now living there—Cotton, an old man-of-war's-man, who for three years had stood guard over Napoleon at Longwood, and Swain, who had served on board the *Victory*, and into whose arms Nelson fell mortally wounded by the shot from the French battleship. In 1836, Peter William Green, a native of Amsterdam, was cast ashore at Tristan, and when Glass and Cotton died he became the leading man in the island.

So the years passed, and the families of the first settlers grew up and married among themselves and had families of their own. Occasionally they were reinforced by some involuntary visitor cast up with the wreckage of a good ship, and rejoiced to find

such friendly help stretched out to him. Gradually he came to regard the island as his home, taking one of the women for his wife, and losing all desire to get back to civilisation when a passing ship put the opportunity within his grasp.

In 1867 the Duke of Edinburgh visited the island, and henceforth the settlement was called by his name.

So the history of Tristan may be written, and almost each chapter is a tale of shipwreck. The people's blood became mixed by descent from sailors of several races—English, Dutch, Scandinavian, Spanish, Italian, and French—so that, as I have said, the negro strain through the women of St. Helena was not predominant. When the *Challenger* Expedition touched at Tristan in 1873 and surveyed the coasts, the population numbered eighty-four, and although sometimes this was increased by new births, and sometimes almost wiped out by an occasional exodus of the younger folk, who went to the Cape of Good Hope or elsewhere, it was almost the exact

number of souls still living on Tristan when I visited them in 1907.

I learnt from Mr. Barrow, the clergyman, that when Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was the English Colonial Minister, an offer was made to the islanders to remove them from their isolated position and convey them at the Government's expense to the Cape of Good Hope. It was put before them by a commissioner named Mr. Tooke, conveyed to Tristan on the *Odin* by Commander Pearce. They were given twenty-four hours in which to make up their minds, and after much discussion three families decided that it would be a good thing to leave, seven families decided to remain, and one family was neutral and did not vote. In consequence of this Mr. Tooke withdrew the offer of the Government.

The offer in any case seemed to me a little strange, for it appears to me unnecessary to tempt people away from a little commonwealth in which, as I can personally testify, they seem contented and cheerful, and where they are able to render most valuable assist-

ance to those unfortunate vessels which so often come to grief on their surf-beaten rocks. Since my visit I have been interested to hear that in the report of a British naval officer, who called at the island in the *Thrush* in 1903, the suggestion has been made that, should a large carrying trade be established between South America and the Cape, the island would be of value as an intermediate station for wireless telegraphy.

It will certainly be a remarkable change if that suggestion is ever carried out, for whereas at present the Tristan islanders are entirely without news of the world, except when stray facts are told to them by vessels which happen to pass their way, they would then be in daily communication with the great throbbing life in the centres of civilisation. Perhaps it would disturb that perfect tranquillity of mind which at present prevails in Tristan da Cunha!

Mr. Barrow, the clergyman, gave me some interesting details of his life on the island. The people welcomed them most warmly, and

were delighted at the visit of the new chaplain and his wife. They at once set apart a house as church and school, a widow named Lucy Green (whose husband was a descendant of the Amsterdam mariner who had been shipwrecked there in 1836) turning out of her little dwelling-place and going to live with relatives. Another woman, Betty Cotton, gave up her house for the clergyman and his wife to use as their own.

The seventeen families on the island took it in turn to supply their pastor weekly with meat, milk, potatoes, and firewood, and, whenever possible, with fish, butter, and eggs. The winter after Mr. Barrow's arrival was a hard one, and the potato stock ran short owing to the crops being blighted by the wind. They also lost a great number of their live stock, no fewer than three hundred and seventy-one cattle having died of starvation from June to November of that year.

In the time of the last chaplain, Mr. Dodgson, the brother, I am told, of Mr. Lewis Carroll, who wrote a famous book called

*Alice in Wonderland*, there was a plague of rats which threatened to destroy the whole population by eating up all their sustenance.

They came to Tristan on a schooner called the *Henry B. Paul*, which was run ashore on the far side of the island, four miles away from cultivated ground. The islanders ignored the clergyman's plea that these ship rats should be at once exterminated, believing that they would not give trouble, as they were so far away.

In the course of a few months, during which they bred tremendously, the vanguard of an army of rats appeared among the potato fields and devoured everything on their march. Then with reinforcements they turned to the wheatfields and devoured the corn. With relentless ferocity they next attacked the rabbits, which were also prolific in the island, and waxed fat upon their prey. Now they invaded the settlement itself, and seemed to have no fear of the human inhabitants, who on their side had become panic-stricken.



It reminds one of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Grey rats, brown rats, fathers and mothers, uncles and cousins, fat old fellows, and frisky youngsters came in battalions to the houses of the Tristan folk, scrambling over the stone walls, into the tussock gardens and the cattle-pens, getting into the lumber sheds, and invading the front parlours and the back bedrooms of the stone-built cottages. On one occasion, when Mr. Dodgson was going to bed, he saw what he imagined to be his black kitten on the bed, but putting out his hand to stroke it, found that his hand had touched the cold, hairy body of an enormous rat who had found his bed a comfortable resting-place. Cats were imported into the island to exterminate this plague, but the rats exterminated the cats!

At the present day there are still a great number of rats on Tristan da Cunha, but the inhabitants say that they have dwindled in numbers, and are no longer such a dangerous pest. Probably they have died out for want of food when they were beaten out

of the settlement. Even now, however, the islanders are unable to grow grain on this account.

The Tristan islanders are best described as farmers. The men spend their time tending their potato-patches, felling trees, and bringing wood in for fuel, shearing the sheep, tending the cattle and goats, fishing, and making bullock-hide moccasins, which, on the sharp rocks of the island, last only a few weeks. The women and girls are busy with washing, cooking, mending, spinning, knitting, milking and churning.

The cattle are, of course, the most important property of the islanders, being useful for their meat, hides, milk, and as beasts of burden. The present number is, I believe, about four hundred, but the islanders are rather vague as to the exact numbers, because the animals wander away to the mountain slopes. It is a custom to slaughter in the autumn and salt down for winter use. The animals, it is said, are decreasing in size, and now weigh about 800 lbs., instead of 1400 lbs. as formerly.

The breed is rather mixed, but they are in fair condition.

Several attempts have been made to establish a cattle trade with St. Helena, Madeira and the Cape, but without success. It was in February 1880 that the first shipment was made, twenty-seven bullocks being sent to St. Helena. A second cargo was sent safely, but the next two vessels in which it was hoped to ship cattle were wrecked on the island through careless navigation, as the islanders contend. After that one or two more shipments were made, but frequent wrecks gave the island a bad name, and all hope of profit was killed by the consequent high freights and insurance. This was a great disappointment to the Tristan folk, because any regular trade with the outside world, however small, would have ensured regular supplies of those commodities which the people are unable to raise for themselves.

A further effort was made in 1903 by a Mr. Beetham, one of the settlers who went to Cape Town on the *Thrush*, to secure a

schooner for use in the cattle trade, but for some reason he abandoned the scheme and returned to his home in America.

The men have five boats, made from wreckage and the wood of the stunted island trees and covered with canvas. To the eye of a sailor they are handy little craft, broader and shorter than a whale-boat. I was not surprised to hear them say that they would venture out to sea as much as fifteen miles to visit a passing vessel, and in good weather they would cross to Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands to gather albatross eggs. This is practically the only excitement which life on this island affords, except when some of the cattle that have broken away and taken to the mountains become savage and dangerous, and have to be shot.

Since they sometimes spend two years without seeing a passing vessel, they have to depend to a very great extent on the produce of the island. For food they have beef, mutton, pork, poultry, milk, butter, eggs, fish and potatoes—not at all a bad diet, with the

exception of bread. All grain, flour and groceries, as well as all clothing, except the socks and stockings which the women and girls knit, and the moccasins, must be got from ships. Oil is obtained from sea-elephants and penguins, and from this candles and a soap of rather poor quality are made.

A few words about the social economy of this strange little community will, I think, be interesting. All their pasture land is held as common property until a man expresses the intention of turning a part of it into cultivation, when he clears and encloses it. He is then considered the owner of it and may bequeath it to his children, who retain it as their own so long as it is kept under cultivation, but whenever that ceases it is thrown open and again becomes common pasture land.

It is agreed that all provisions or any kind of produce supplied to a ship for the general use of the crew and passengers are to be deemed the property of the community, and the proceeds of the sale in clothing, stores,

or money are equally divided among the families. To prevent this system acting unfairly each family takes its turn in providing the supplies demanded.

When Peter Green succeeded Cotton and Glass, the first of the settlers, he became a kind of patriarchal governor in Tristan, and, being a strong-minded old fellow, he took the lead in everything. As a sign of authority he used to fly the Union Jack over his doorway, and this old 'sea-salt' was authorised by the Bishop of St. Helena to solemnise marriages, which no doubt he did in a very satisfactory manner. After his death there was no chief of the settlement, and society resembled the most primitive state of mankind when the family and groups of families preceded the tribal system.

It will be remembered that when I landed on Tristan the islanders stated that no one was chief or governor over them, and doubtless, when any controversy arose, no family would recognise a central authority who might impose his will upon them. But in

working practice, Ripetto, the Genoese sailor, is the leader, and in American phraseology, 'what he says goes.' He is the only man able to both read and write (some of the others have been taught to read, but have not yet acquired anything like fluent penmanship), and being a most intelligent, able fellow, he is naturally chosen to represent the views of his people when, as has happened two or three times, they have sent communications to the British Government.

His position, however, is accidental rather than according to any unwritten law, and, strictly speaking, the social status of *Tristan da Cunha* is a commonwealth of a kind which has been dreamed of by the philosophers of all ages, and by our modern Socialists. There is no hatred, envy or malice among them; everything is done for the common good; they render each other brotherly service; they are free from all the vices of civilisation; they worship God in a simple way; they live very close to Nature, but without pantheistic superstition; greed and usury are



unknown among them; there are no class distinctions, no rich or poor. Truly, on this lonely rock in the South Atlantic, we have a people who belong rather to the Pastoral Age of the world than to our modern unrestful life, and who, without theory or politics or written laws, have reached that state which has been described by the imaginative writers of all ages, haunted by the thought of the decadent morality of the seething cities, as the Golden Age or the Millennium.

Perhaps it would be good for our theoretical gentlemen to organise an expedition to Tristan to see how their ideas work out in practice. But the thought occurs to me that, however deep their admiration might be, they would not be tempted to share the simple life of the islanders.

As Mr. Barrow, the clergyman, has said in his report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, his people are remarkable in having no government, and no public opinion, no rents and no rates, no regular hours of work, no magistrate and no police,

no post, no shops, no drainage, no crops save one, and no frost, but plenty of wind and rain, and a fair amount of sun.

Their amusements are limited. Occasionally at Christmas and the New Year they play games of cricket, even the women handling the bat and ball with great enjoyment, and the boys find continual amusement in bathing through the summer months. They have to keep to the pools among the rocks to avoid the sharks which come prowling round the coast.

I have said enough to show that in spite of their isolation they are by no means miserable, and that in virtue they find a quiet happiness not to be despised.

One thing I must not forget to tell. Agnès became a hero and almost a demi-god among them because of his accordion. I suppose that never in their lives before had they heard such sweet strains of music as my sailor boy extracted from his instrument for their delectation.

It was on board the *J. B. Charcot* that this

scene took place. The islanders swarmed on board one day eager to see our little ship and to explore all her wonders, and then Agnès tuned up and gave them of his best. It seemed to bewitch them into a kind of joyful madness. They all began to cut steps in a grotesque way, and Ripetto, the tall Italian, amused me vastly by kicking up his heels and dancing a jig on deck. Agnès was a proud lad, for never before had he received such an ovation.

But he was embarrassed when the delight of the islanders in the wonder-working notes of the accordion became so decisive that they could not bear the thought of living henceforth without its music. They desired to barter with him for the possession of it. Their offers mounted up until Agnès might have exchanged his music-box for three sheep—and Larose begged him to close with this offer.

The price will not be considered small on either side considering our need for fresh meat and the islanders' scanty property. I

think Agnès was inclined to accept the offer through sheer good-nature, but I had my own comrades to think of, and I knew that they might find the time hang heavy upon their hands in the loneliness of a long sea voyage, and might give way to melancholy if deprived of such a great source of entertainment. I therefore gave the islanders to understand that no riches they could give us would induce us to part with such a sublime instrument. They yielded to the decision sadly, but understood the value we placed upon the possession of that accordion, which I suppose had been bought by Agnès in some seafaring port for a few francs or so.

One other detail of the visit of the Tristan folk to the *J. B. Charcot* does not escape my memory. Many of them were very sea-sick, for they had never experienced the peculiar sensations of being on board a fishing ketch tossing in a choppy sea!

Of course one of the chief objects of our visit to Tristan, apart from the quest of knowledge, was to obtain certain supplies in

the way of fresh victuals, and before leaving we engaged in the serious business of barter. The islanders made curious demands. They had, for example, a passionate desire for nails, however rusty they might be. They coveted our boots and shoes, and offered much wealth in kind for any old shoe leather. The women were clamorous for our shirts, those big-striped, gaudy, cotton things which sailors favour. The colours fascinated their eyes, and in imagination they thought of their own loveliness when they might stroll upon the cliffs in such gay blouses.

So for these things, and a store of gunpowder (of which we had more than enough), tea, cocoa, salt and sugar, dealt out not ungenerously, we bought six sheep, three pigs, some poultry, and potatoes. It was with natural regret that we parted from these good, honest, simple folk, who had dealt with us most honourably, and had entertained us with bounteous hospitality so far as their larder allowed. I paid my respects to Mr. and Mrs. Barrow, who had been most kind,

and there was much handshaking and waving of hands when we rowed off to our boat again from the surf-beaten shore. The *J. B. Charcot* stood out to sea, and once more we went on light wings down an easterly course for Kerguelen bound.

## CHAPTER IV

Chaque soir, espérant des lendemains épiques,  
L'azur phosphorescent de la mer des Tropiques  
Enchantait leur sommeil d'un mirage doré.'

JOSÉ MARIA DE HEREDIA.

WE left Tristan da Cunha, as I have said, after a very pleasant spell, on the 27th of January 1908, and our voyage was not very eventful until we had passed the meridian of the Cape of Good Hope on the 15th of February. Then, on the night of the 15th, a gale blew up, and we had an ugly sea.

From afar came the long rolling swell of water driven forward by the relentless force of the wind and rising high into peaks and ridges over which our little ship tumbled, staggering first one way and then another, like a horse beaten about the head by a brutal driver. My brother and I shared the watch on deck all that night and all the following day,



during which the force of the wind increased and whipped us forward as though we were being chased by fiends. We had the consolation that we could carry canvas and run in a straight course.

The little *J. B. Charcot*, too, was splendid. There was no vice in her. She was not one of those cross-grained, perverse creatures that always have a leeward lurch, and struggle at the helm and fall up against the seas like a one-eyed mule, splashing the spray to the topsails. Every seaman knows the brand of a beast like that, which makes steering a torture and dirty weather a death-trap.

Our ketch, bless her brave little heart, had been so trimly built by a master of his craft, that she rode like a cork, or rather—for that is a helpless and soulless thing—like a beautiful sea-bird, taking the very ugliest sea with grace and courage and wonderful ‘handiness’ as we say, so that the long rollers slipped under her and the wind could never get to grips with her. We had but little free-board, yet during the height of the storm

hardly a bucket of water broke over her. Many a bigger ship would have wallowed and waddled in that gale until it was a bruised and broken thing, but our toy boat—it was hardly more in such a storm—sped swiftly along with white wings straining and a high spirit.

It was a thrilling thing to take the wheel and feel the throb of her heart-beats as she breasted the high seas, and to feel how sensitive she was, even in this struggle, to the touch of the helmsman, like a finely bred horse who feels the slightest pressure of the rein.

To a passing vessel or an ocean liner or a three-master we should have looked, doubtless, a poor little mouse of a thing waiting to be drowned. Out there with no one to see us, we felt in our own hearts like the old Vikings who went out into the wind and the unknown seas without fear or foreboding. I sing the praises of the *J. B. Charcot*—good luck be with her wherever she goes—but alas! even the best of ships may be tried

too hard, and in this storm we did not escape without a shaking.

The wind had dropped after twenty hours or so, and had veered round a few points. As every sailor knows, that is the hour of danger. It is what we call an untrue sea, for the wind changing brings a swell from a different quarter, while the old sea drives on its way and, meeting the new force, challenges it, provokes it, and churns up the great water into jagged masses and tumbling walls. Long hours after the gale has spent itself, the waves it has raised fight their fierce battle in which the currents strive with each other for mastery. The officer of the watch keeps his eyes open and counts each third sea which breaks under his bows, and every ninth sea, which is the worst of all, expecting a buffet which may cause his ship to stagger and swoon as though dazed by pain, and perhaps to ship a sea that will make her lose all balance under the awful weight of it and lurch sideways to destruction.

So it was with us. I was below when the

blow struck us, so hard that it seemed to shake the life out of the boat. Things were flying about me on every side. Our cabin was a ruin. There was a terrific noise as though all our timbers were breaking, and before my wits had got straightened out a thunderbolt, as it seemed, came hurtling down the companion-way.

It was Jean Bontemps, the boatswain, who had been at the helm, and now scrambled into our cabin on all fours. I sprang at him in a passion, inarticulate with rage at what looked for the moment like a sailor's worst treason.

‘You have left the helm!’ I said.

But then I saw that Bontemps's face was bleeding, and that he was in a frightful state. I learned afterwards that when the *J. B. Charcot* had shipped a brutal sea he had been swept away from the wheel with a violent shock, and after clutching at a mast, while the boat heeled over and staggered this way and that like a drunken beast, had been hurled clean down the companion-way.

But at the time I waited for no explanation. Realising swiftly something of what had happened, I rushed up on deck and sprang to the helm, steadying our poor trembling ship and wrenching her round from the broadside of the waves.

By God's grace she had escaped a second sea. If, after the first tons of water had come on board and sent her lurching over, she had taken another dose of the same kind, it would have been an end of the *J. B. Charcot*, and I should not have chronicled adventures in Kerguelen. But terrible damage had been done, and the misfortune robbed us of one member of the crew, who had been a favourite with all of us.

The sea did not take toll of human life that day, but poor Patrick was washed overboard. I saw him swimming and struggling in that swollen waste of waters, and I turned sick with pity. We could do nothing to save him. We too should have been drowned if we had lowered a boat. But the loss of Patrick was a tragedy which cast a gloom

over us. He had been a brave and cheerful comrade.

It was some time before we could reckon up all the damage done by those few moments of destruction. Other lives of animals were sacrificed to the wrath of Nature, and though we did not have a sentimental regret for them, because, poor beasts, they were to be devoured in any case, we were dismayed at the loss of five sheep and three pigs which we had brought away so gladly from the isle of Tristan. They also had been washed overboard. One of our sextants was broken and—a serious misfortune—our compass had been carried away. Esnault's last remaining plates and dishes were smashed into atoms.

Even our dinner had gone into the sea, for we had just been preparing for a meal when the water swept on deck and poured through the galley like a millrace.

Larose, who was usually stolid in any crisis, was for once excited by this tragedy in the kitchen. He came to me in a disconsolate way and said, 'Captain, what are we going to

do for a meal? This is terrible, Captain. All our dinner wasted like that!' I forget whether I answered him politely.

Below deck we were swamped, and it took us a great deal of hard work to get things shipshape again. I fixed up a smaller compass by the wheel, and Henri and I were very busy in tidying up the cabin. Fortunately the storm had abated, and although it was not good weather and the sea was very choppy after the gale, we made fair headway on our course.

As day followed day and we sailed eastward-ho! through the grey immensity of the Indian Ocean, where no other sail appeared on the far horizon, my brother and I could not keep back a new sensation of anxious hope. Each hour in which the wind drove us on our course, and the small ship, which had been our good and faithful friend, breasted the swelling waters and left behind a silver wake clear cut for many knots upon the surface of that lonely sea, brought us nearer



to those barren shores that we had dreamed of for months, and where we should make our dwelling-place in loneliness.

Often when I took the watch at night and gazed through the glimmering twilight across the phosphorescent highway which was our road of adventure, and perhaps—who knew?—our way to death, strange thoughts took possession of me and held my soul in the grip of an emotion not to be expressed in words.

I knew that we should encounter many dangers. The chart of Kerguelen was as familiar to my eyes as the map of Paris, but that chart was vaguely drawn in and pieced together from reports of seamen and sealers who had not gone far around the coasts or into the rock-strewn straits of that broken mass of uninhabited islands. We should have to feel our way carefully and make our own soundings. We should have to test and correct and discover the outline of the coast and the position of the reefs and rocks roughly indicated upon that parchment, which left so much to the imagination and so much to luck.

It was still a no-man's-land. Somewhere or other there was a French flag flying, or there stood upon some high promontory a pole from which the French flag had flown, where it had been put up by my compatriot, Lieutenant Kerguelen, over a hundred years before, as a sign that the Island of Desolation and the adjacent islands had been taken possession of in the name of France. But that was only a sentimental conquest.

Kerguelen himself, setting out from France on a voyage of discovery to settle one way or another the dream of philosopher and explorer, far back in the ages of the world, of a Great South Land, had seen but little of the place to which he had given his name. On the first expedition he had not set one foot upon those basalt rocks, for tempestuous seas were breaking upon them, and only through fog and rain-clouds of a day in January in the year 1772 did he gaze upon the dim dark land where death lay in wait for any ship that should venture close. But Kerguelen's mental vision saw more than his searching eyes, and

when he returned to France he told many great tales of that island group, which, as far as he knew, stretched southward to the unknown continent of the Antarctic.

French scientists urged him to go back to gather more definite knowledge, and Lieutenant Kerguelen made a second expedition which was more fruitful in actual information of the coast-line and the bays. But even now his chart was but a sketch-map which left great gaps and the dotted lines of uncertainty.

He had been followed on the southward trail by the great English seaman Captain James Cook, who also had been inspired by the hope of finding the Southern Continent which the imagination of many writers had peopled with a white race more civilised than those of the Western world, and had stored with natural riches beyond the dreams of wealth. Cook himself was a sturdy, hard-headed seaman, who was not likely to indulge in those brilliant and enticing fancies, but he had the genius of the explorer and the dogged

courage of his race, and he steered his course southward and eastward, searching with far-seeing eyes for any sign of land. He too sought Kerguelen and lay-to in its broadest bays, and saw this sanctuary of the sea where the whales and sea-elephants swarm in thousands, beyond reach, at that time, of the hunters who on other shores fought these monsters in their own element and killed them in vast numbers.

Long after Cook came Sir James Ross in 1843, but the coast was too perilous for him to venture to land, and he sailed away again without adding much to the drawing on the chart. Then, in the seventies of the nineteenth century, the great *Challenger* Expedition had come to Kerguelen, and to those brave men I owed most of my knowledge of the land to which the *J. B. Charcot* was now flying with all her canvas set.

But when all had been told, Kerguelen was still the Island of Desolation, uninhabited, and to a vast extent unknown.

During the past fifty years other ships had

been there. American sealers, following the sea-elephants to their furthest hiding-place, had put into some of the bays, had made the black rocks run with the blood of their victims, and had gone away without adding a word to the geographical records. They had abandoned it to its own loneliness, for it lay too far off the track of the highways of commerce to tempt men to risk death when seals might be found nearer to the world's great continents.

I knew that when we found our first anchorage off the coast of this Desolate Isle we should see no human face but those of our few good comrades, that we should get no help from any human hand, that we should find no light to steer the way, no stores to eke out our own dwindling supplies, no footprint to promise companionship and human society. There we six, we little band of brothers, would be thrown absolutely upon our own resources. Upon our own skill as seamen and hunters would depend our safety and lives. Upon our moral strength and

endurance would depend our health and our discipline. Upon our cautiousness and vigilance would depend, but not entirely, the fate of the *J. B. Charcot* and those young men who had volunteered to serve with us on our adventures.

I say not entirely, for whatever vigilance, carefulness, courage, endurance and discipline might be ours, we were at the mercy of something greater than any of these—Fate or Luck. We were sailing into the Unknown. We could not anticipate or be forewarned against the dangers lurking there. By good luck we might avoid a sunken rock or an uncharted reef. But luck is inconstant. One cannot have it always the same way. By bad luck we might strike upon the rocks before we had set foot upon the land.

And what of my men? Could I trust them? Could I be sure that such a boy as Esnault, the cook, such lads as Agnès and Larose would prove themselves to be of that stuff which is necessary for explorers on a desert island? I was going to put them to a

great test, a test only restricted by the last limit of human endurance. For more than a year they must stand by me in fair weather and foul, through days of ceaseless labour, in hardships worse than any they had known, in journeyings over grim and dreadful mountains, where there would be none of the comforts of life, none of those compensations which men balance against their toil. They were to go hunting with me. Upon their bravery and the toughness of their hearts our larder would depend. If they were faint-hearted, or if their strength gave way, we should starve and die. In that eternal loneliness, cut off from all society and amusement and human variety, the minds of these young men would be put to a trial of strength with those devils of melancholia and madness which tempt to murder or suicide, men who are very much alone in the wild places of the world.

I could not ignore all these possibilities. The lives of the crew of the *J. B. Charcot* were in my keeping. Upon my shoulders, and those of my brother Henri, would rest any



tragedy that might befall them. But I harboured no fears, and was shaken by no forebodings of tragic happenings. At least I would not allow myself to entertain those little devils of doubt which poke their ugly faces into the brain of a man who is facing the mystery of the unknown.

After all, I had spent nearly six months already with my boys, and never once had they failed me in an hour of danger, never once had they shirked their work, never once had they shown a sign of fear or faint-heartedness. They were of good stuff. I could put my faith in them. One can go a long way with willing hearts.

So, as I neared the Island of Desolation, I was eager to start this new life of wandering about its coasts and of exploring its country. And all the time I dwelt upon the thought of our seal-hunting. That must be our chief business. I must get many tons of seal oil in order to pay my men when they reached their last port. If bad luck went with us on our hunting trips, if the seals had

fled to other haunts, if we did not get the trick of capturing them, if their strength should be too much for us, there would be no joy in getting to Melbourne, for I should be worse than a shipwrecked mariner. I should be a bankrupt master, and my faithful servants would go unpaid and their reproaches would cut me to the heart.

Such, then, were the emotions with which I drew near to the great goal of our hope and ambition, and I trust my readers will pardon such reminiscences from a seaman, who, in spite of his youth and high spirits (I may claim to have had both those good qualities), had also his very serious moments when he thought of his burden of responsibility.

Our first sight of land was when, towards nightfall on 4th March, we saw through the hazy twilight the mountain peak of Croy Island, the most westerly of a group of volcanic rocks called the Cloudy Islands. It was our intention to make for Christmas Island, on the north-east of Kerguelen. Out in those seas, with sudden gales and uncharted

channels, one cannot keep to time and hold on a course with the regularity of a cross-Channel steam-packet. We were to fight our way a long way round before reaching the anchorage.

We fell at once into dirty weather. Fierce gusts were blowing, and we were alarmed at the thought of getting into a channel between the islands which, according to our chart, were rocky and dangerous. We therefore stood out further and tacked northward and eastward. At 7 o'clock that evening we lay-to for the night, while all around us there was the strange and ominous noise of bubbling waters and the sullen booming of the wind.

At 4 A.M. we got to the mouth of Bligh's Cap, discovered by that good seaman who was with Captain Cook in the *Resolution*, and afterwards in the famous mutiny of the *Bounty*. Here we were enveloped in a thick fog, through which we could see no trace of land, though Henri and I gazed into the sea-mist with strained and anxious eyes, knowing that it was a deadly peril to go drifting like

this near to unknown rocks. Later in the day we crept southwards, and through the grey haze saw land on our starboard bow, which we knew by our observations to be Roland Island. We were very close to it, but we did not know which way the current was drifting, and we were in fear of being lodged on one of the rocky shelves.

Fortunately we saw a small bay on the east coast not marked on the chart, which gives a very indefinite outline of the island and is just dotted in, in the vaguest and most inaccurate way.

Henri decided to try to get anchorage in this bay, but there was a heavy swell on, though the wind was dropping, and presently the *Charcot* lay becalmed. Not a breath of wind could we whistle up to carry our little ship into harbour, and with the current running swiftly there was trouble ahead. Henri and I decided to lower our biggest whaling boat and to tow the *J. B. Charcot* to safe waters.

Four of us took to the oars and, with a rope

to the bows of our ship, we pulled our hardest. It was tough work, but inch by inch we struggled along and got into the water of the bay, where there was good shelter. Here we found ten fathoms of water and heaved the anchor. But it was a sandy bottom and by no means an ideal anchorage.

It was then 6th March, and on the following day I landed, and taking Esnault, the cook, with some provisions, and a gun over my shoulder, set out to climb the high peak of the island. It was my first expedition on land in the Kerguelen group, and for the first time I trod those rugged basalt rocks which rise in tumbled masses of black and barren ledges and ridges and plateaux, as though great giants had been at play hurling huge boulders about.

Esnault and I climbed till we were out of breath, and rested awhile in that high eyrie to look down far below upon the boat. A mere toy it seemed, hugging the shore in the little bay.

Intense silence brooded round us—a silence

undisturbed, since the first upheavals of Nature in the caldron of the world, by any sound save the cry of the sea-birds and the howling of the winds which circle round this peak with a wild wailing, or fierce shrieks like witch-hags chasing each other on their broomsticks, or with a low and murmurous booming between the gusts.

We ascended to the topmost peak, scrambling over broken pillars of rock and slipping over loose boulders wet with sea-mists. Sometimes, as we went, birds were startled from the sparse tussock grass of the lower ledges or from cavities between the rocks, the females giving a plaintive whistle, the drakes sounding a deep, sonorous quack, as they flew away on strong wings or ran like grouse or quails along the ridges. They were teal—a rather small duck with dark brown plumage tipped with white, and another with a lighter shade of brown. It was the first time in their life-story that their quietude had been disturbed by human beings, and they were startled at the sight of us. I shot a

few of them, the first game that had fallen to our guns since leaving France, and the sound of my gun seemed to echo against every crag and in every cavern. Thousands of birds were scared from their nests and flew with a clamour of wings and frightened cries across the island.

Esnault picked up the ducks that had fallen to their unknown enemy, and then we descended the path, carrying this welcome addition to our larder.

That night we had a feast on board, during which I described my climb as we sat at table in our little cabin. We decided that the first new peak to be explored by us should be called after the gallant man whose portrait looked down upon us from the bulk-head. I hope that the mountain on Roland Island will always be known by the name of Charcot Peak which we put upon our chart.

Over the ducks our tongues wagged faster than is usual with sailors, for it was good fare after our tinned provisions. and held out a



promise of 'flesh-pots' which would soften the hardships of our future life.

Esnault had surpassed himself in his galley, taking a new pride in his profession, and he bore in the steaming dish with an air of triumph. Even Larose, who had been wondering how Kerguelen would agree with him, concluded that if such ducks could often be stewed in their own juice, life would not be unsupportable. My readers will perhaps pardon me lingering over that meal-time, which still makes my mouth water at the thought of it.

During our stay in Roland Isle we came near to losing our gallant little craft. The bay afforded no safe shelter from the northeasterly gales that came whistling up with shrill sharp gusts, so that we could never relax our vigilance or be certain of safety from one hour to another. I was sitting at a meal in the cabin when one of these wind volleys came booming into the bay and caught us with a frightful broadside as we lay at anchor. It came with swift and sudden

force and heeled us almost on to our beam ends.

I was first made aware of the blow that had struck us by lurching off my seat and finding that all the perpendiculars of the cabin had shifted into acute angles, or to speak more simply, that we had been thrown sideways with a loud bang from the capful of wind. The meal that had been laid by Esnault was promptly hurled into our laps and on to the floor, where the juice trickled into our lockers.

At the same moment, for it all happened in a few seconds, I heard Bontemps's voice shouting on deck. I caught his words and they scared me a good deal.

‘We are running on to the rocks! Captain, come quick! We are running on to the coast!’

I was not long in taking that companion ladder. I swung up on deck, and a swift glance to starboard and helm showed me that our position was indeed most perilous. Our anchor had dragged in the sandy bottom and the smack of wind had buffeted us right round

to the jagged walls of that basalt coast. Our stern at that moment was only a few yards from the rocks, and it was clear that another of those wild volleys would dash us to certain destruction. I think for the next quarter of an hour our hearts stood in our mouths, as the old saying goes.

None of us gave any expression to any sign of fear, but I know that I was very much afraid, not for myself but for our brave little ship. It was pitiful to think that after her gallantry on the high seas she might be broken into splinters on those abominable cliffs, which were as sharp and jagged as a saw.

We listened intently to the voice of the wind. Outside in the open sea it was groaning and complaining and fretting the waters into a witches' caldron of seething surf. But, by the grace of God, it did not come quickly again into the funnel of the narrow bay, and presently its force abated. Our anchors held throughout the rest of the night, and when the dawn came, Henri and I, who had been sharing

the watch, turned in for a little sleep, with strict commands to the relief watch to keep a sharp lookout for any sign of change in the wind. But we had lost all desire to remain longer in that bay, and decided to move on at once to safer anchorage.

When destruction on the rocks seemed to be the almost certain fate of the *J. B. Charcot*, I had taken a measure of precaution which might at least be the means of keeping ourselves alive for some months. Hurrying into the cabin I stuffed a canvas sack with a variety of articles that would be of most use to shipwrecked seamen cast ashore. Chief among them were guns, cartridges, matches, needles, twine, biscuits, rum, and some tins of meat.

It seemed to me that if we could cling to the sack we should be by no means helpless. We would make a struggle for life anyhow on Roland Isle, and with Robinson Crusoe as our example, we might grow long beards and still be alive and well when a sealer or a whaling boat came within hail. I had proved

that birds were plentiful on these rocks, and our guns would provide a larder. With matches we should not go without a camp fire, with needles and twine we could make a boat out of our old sail. For a time it would have been no worse than a picnic!

So at least I assured myself, though the fun of the thing would have soon worn off, and the good God alone could say how many years might pass before we sighted a friendly sail and escaped from that rock-bound prison. Providentially, as I have said, we escaped that fate on Roland Isle, but the 'Shipwreck Sack,' as we called it, became an important part of our equipment, and the crew were instructed to make that their first care if the worst came and our good ship fell upon the rocks. All knew where to lay their hands upon it.

Well, as I have said, we decided to get away to safer waters, but fate played tricks with us. Bontemps whistled at the bows, but not a breath of wind answered him. After the storm we were in a dead calm, and

our sails drooped like the wings of a tired bird. There was nothing to be done but to remain where we were. But at any moment another of those gusts which came eddying round Charcot Peak might again catch us and give us another horrid half-hour, ending perhaps in the tragedy which we had already so narrowly escaped.

Henri and I hit upon a plan which was not perfect but the best we could do. We had a boat lowered, and, with a rope slung to the bows of our small ship, rowed across to land on one side of the bay and fixed it taut to the rocks. Then we fastened a rope to the ship's stern and, rowing across to the other side of the narrow bay, tied that up also.

Here we were, then, tethered to earth like a restive colt, and I suppose those ropes would have been some use in keeping us off the rocks, though not much use if the wind proved a heavy strain. It gave us a sense of security anyhow. But after the calm we were at our wits' end how to circumvent the funnel of wind that now came circling again round

what we called that damned rock, in every direction but the right one to fill our sails and carry us out to open water.

It almost appeared that we were in no better plight than if we had actually gone on to the rocks. It was very nice to have a ship to sleep in, of course, but what we wanted was a ship to sail in, and sail we could not with those madcap gusts succeeded by exasperating calms.

Well, our sailor's wits got to work again. We took the anchor on its chain to shore and drove it into the land at an angle from the *Charcot*. Then with the winch on board we hauled ourselves round foot by foot towards the north of the bay. Shifting our anchor further and further to the extremity of the bay, we worked at the winch again, and, strange as it may appear, succeeded in getting clear of the harbour into which we had towed the little ship upon our arrival, little guessing how difficult would be the way of escape. This manoeuvre on our part does not come within the code-book of navigation,



but it is surprising what things you have to do when you go exploring desert islands! For the first time, the smallness of the *J. B. Charcot* was a source of safety.

Anyhow, there we stood out at sea, where we filled our sails with a good west wind, free at last from those goblin blasts that had come dancing round Charcot Peak.

It was on 9th March that we made our cheerful farewell to Roland Isle. But we were more than three hours tacking up the bight towards Christmas Harbour, for which we were now bound. Night had just fallen when we dropped anchor, but for an hour or more we were able to see the scenery upon the mainland of Kerguelen, which we had now reached at that point.

Christmas Harbour received its name from the fact that Captain James Cook anchored here on Christmas Day 1777, with his two vessels, the *Resolution* and *Discovery*. In describing the character of that land which now lay before us, and where we were to wander for many a long month and have

many adventures, I confess that my thoughts may be coloured by a familiarity with and even fondness for those grim shores. Other sailors have sighted this coast or lain for a few days in Christmas Harbour, but in fog and storm their imagination has been appalled by the somewhat awful aspect of the Island of Desolation.

Yet, as we sailed into the harbour, Henri and I were both impressed, profoundly, by the grandeur and solemn majesty of the hill country which stretched away, peak upon peak, to the great mountain ranges and their cloud-capped summits. The harbour itself was about a mile wide at the gateway, with Cape François on the north, and on the south a rock 150 feet high, where the incessant sea has bored an archway 100 feet broad, through which, at one angle, one sees the coast-line with other mighty cliffs and rocks stretching away to the far horizon. On one side is a bay increasing the breadth of Christmas Harbour, which narrows down gradually towards its head, where there is a

smooth beach of dark sand stretching across for more than a thousand feet.

It was here that we anchored, staring above us at the great black basalt ramparts, like the bastions of some vast Bastille, rising ledge by ledge to the height of more than a thousand feet, while beyond was the great Table Mountain, 1350 feet high, and Mount Havergal, 1430 feet, upon which the giants seemed to have spread white table-cloths for an Olympian feast.

Black as coal were the smooth polished walls above us, silent as a fortress of King Death, terrible at first sight in their frowning majesty, yet not without wondrous shades and lights and colours. For the sun, setting over the land as we sailed in, had filled the sky with a glory of red and gold, reflected with magic beauty upon the smooth waters within the shelter of the rocks; and its rays bathed the basalt walls with a rich glow, flashing upon the face of them as though some of these jagged spurs were veined with gold, and giving a curiously soft beauty to

some of the rounded boulders, as though they were cushions upon which great deities might recline at ease, and overspreading others with a faint crimson flush, and empurpling the deep shadows that lay between the ridges.

I have seen that coast a thousand times and more, when in a snow squall or a wet fog it has seemed truly diabolical in its grim ugliness, a savage naked land of desolation to be shunned by mortals and good angels; but on a fair day, with the sun aglint upon the rocks, all is different, and Kerguelen has a beauty of its own which steals into the heart and puts a spell upon one's senses, and has haunting memories for seamen who have adventured there.

We did not arrive without a greeting. The inhabitants of this land, upon which no human foot was set when we came near, had, it seemed, come to stare at us with round-eyed surprise. They were penguins—hundreds of them—and they stood in ranks upon the terraces of the cliffs, like files of soldiers pre-

paring to defend their shore from invasion. Curiously human creatures, like old, old dwarfs, especially when seen in the darkening gloom, they stood there erect as though they had seen us from afar and were waiting to hold parley with us. I have said they were like soldiers drawn up in single files. Perhaps I mix my metaphors, but, seen nearer at hand, they might have been the waiters in some vast restaurant of natural history in black tail-coats and clean white shirt-fronts. And they bowed to us repeatedly with the gravity of a *maître d'hôtel*, as though saying, 'Soyez les bienvenus, messieurs. Quel vin, messieurs, desirent-t-ils?'

All through our wanderings in Kerguelen we came across these penguins, and our great French author, Anatole France, would find ample material here for a sequel to his *Île des Pingouins*. We had to kill some of them, poor birds, for we needed food, and found their flesh not bad and very comforting to our hunger; but they always were most polite to us, having a natural and unfailing courtesy

even to their executioners, and in a way they gave us a sense of human companionship.

Many a time we have shouted with laughter at their comical ways. They had no fear of us when we did not go out of our way to disturb them, and, often standing in front of a king penguin, I would talk to him in French and he would reply with that grave inclination of his head which is their most characteristic movement, and by a most sagacious expression in his grave button eyes. At times we used to go to their nests—which are no more than holes in the sands—to search for their eggs. The females used to waddle away, each with her one egg held firmly between her web-foot, and then we would just take them by the neck and slip the egg away without hurting them. But at those times we sometimes got a sharp nip from their strong bills.

That, however, is anticipating our future life on Kerguelen, and I must again return to the night we anchored in Christmas Harbour under the shelter of the immense cliffs.

That night my brother and I sat in the cabin talking of all our plans, while on deck Agnès played soft music on his accordion, and Larose, Bontemps and Esnault played a game of cards, well thumbed after their long voyage.

It was with a sense of thankfulness that Henri and I faced each other over the chart of the island. We had come many thousands of miles through storms in two oceans, through weather varying between strong gales and dead calms, and we had arrived at last at the land of our ambition without any serious mishap. Before us now lay months of adventure of another kind. Kerguelen was our own. No other soul claimed a share of this Island of Desolation, but before it could be really ours, we should have to explore its hidden ways and fill up the gaps upon the chart. It was not to be a life of love-in-idleness, but we looked forward to the toil and the sport of it with buoyant and trusting hearts.



## CHAPTER V

ON the morning after our arrival in Christmas Harbour, we went on shore and killed our first seals. It will seem that we were in rather a hurry to go hunting, but the truth is we wanted to test our skill in what was butcher's work, but very necessary in our scheme of life. Also, as I must confess, it was difficult to resist the temptation of experimenting immediately with the preparation of that oil which was to be our chief source of wealth at our journey's end.

Later in our story I shall have to tell of great seal-hunts, when we were surrounded at one time by more than a hundred of these huge sea-elephants, and when we were not without peril among them. But although on our first day ashore on the mainland of Kerguelen we met and killed only ten seals,

the excitement of that day's hunt still lives in my memory. They were lying on a ledge of rock close to the sea, where an old bull among them, measuring over twenty feet in length, lay among his wives telling them stories perhaps of those days far back in his life when the man-hunter first came with his death-dealing weapons to massacre his herds. They lay there lazily, suspecting no danger and blinking in the morning light.

Some of the families were asleep or scratching themselves cosily with their flippers. We came upon them suddenly, armed with heavy clubs and one gun. It was with the clubs that we first attacked. A good hard blow on the head of the female seals would kill them outright, but naturally at first we were clumsy in our attack, and I was alarmed when I saw the lads within reach of the great mouths of those beasts, which they thrust forward with a sudden jerk. One bite would have taken a limb off. But my young fellows were active and the seals retreated, always face forward to their foes, until they were stunned and killed

by the blows which were hurled upon them by Agnès, whose lead-weighted club circled above his head and fell upon his victim with prodigious strength. The old bull I shot through the head. It was now our duty to skin the animals and to strip them of the blubber, which forms a layer several inches thick between the skin and the flesh. It is perfectly white and very much like pig's lard in appearance. With our knives we set to work at this job, and I am bound to say it was by no means a pleasant or elegant task. The boys were not handy at first and they were covered with blood and grease, and I never saw a more horrid or disgusting mess than we made on that rocky plateau in Christmas Harbour. However, these unpleasant things have to be done when one goes on a picnic to desert islands, and one must not be too delicate or thin-skinned.

Having gathered together a large pile of blubber in great slices, we stowed it into a boat and rowed alongside the *J. B. Charcot*, where we were received with enthusiasm by

Henri, Larose and Esnault, who had remained on board. The next business on hand was to melt down the blubber into oil and to make the casks to store it. The first operation was an abomination, the second an exasperation. To obtain our oil we brought out our stewing kettles and set them up on deck. Then we lighted a little furnace beneath them, packed the blubber into the kettles, screwed them down, and waited the result with mingled anxiety and pride. The result was appalling. From the furnace there rolled up, and away over Kerguelen, a thick black smoke, as though we had established a factory on the Island of Desolation. The smoke blinded us and choked us, but it was as nothing to the aroma which began to proceed from the kettles and increased in pungency with terrifying speed.

That smell was haunting in its really damnable offensiveness. For miles around we made ourselves an abomination to Nature. The stench from those kettles was sickening even to seamen, who are not too squeamish. It worked its way into our clothes and into

the pores of our skin. It pervaded every corner of the ship. It took away our appetite for food. Larose himself no longer sat down to his meals with that voracity which was his peculiar characteristic, and was decidedly 'off colour.' The *J. B. Charcot* was a disgrace to her owners. The clean little white soul of her must have revolted against such evil treatment, for her decks were swimming in grease and blood.

Meanwhile I retired to a quiet spot beyond, where, untroubled and unabashed by the observation of my comrades, I undertook to make the casks in which our oil was to be held. It had of course been impossible to bring out with us two hundred ready-made casks. The hold of the *J. B. Charcot* was not nearly large enough for such a cargo. But I had brought with us all the material necessary for cask-making, and all that I had to do was to fix the staves together and nail the hoops on to them. It seemed a simple affair, and had I not taken a lesson in Paris before starting on the expedition? It is true the lesson

lasted only ten minutes, but the expert manufacturer of casks showed me how the trick was done, and said with a friendly smile: 'You see, there is nothing in it. Any fool can make a cask.'

I began to work with a sense of mastery. With my hammer handy, and my nails and hoops and staves most admirably disposed, I rolled up my shirt-sleeves and prepared to produce half a dozen good casks in a very short time. 'It is so simple!' I said to myself. As my friend remarked, 'Any fool could do it.' But somehow or other things did not work out in the way I had expected. I took the staves, placed them together ready for the hoop, when, to my chagrin, as I put the last stave in position, the whole bundle tumbled apart like a house of cards blown down by a puff of wind. I cursed my clumsiness and started again. The same thing happened. At the third time this reiteration of failure was ridiculous, and I laughed aloud. 'Come, come,' I said, 'this won't do, you know!'

When, at the fifteenth time of trying, the pieces of wood were scattered about in all directions, it was no longer a farce but a tragedy.

‘Good Lord!’ I thought, ‘what will happen if I cannot get these cursed casks together? What is the use of hunting seals and boiling oil if we cannot store it when it is all prepared? How can we pay our men when we get to Melbourne, supposing we ever get there, if we arrive without any source of wealth?’

Beads of perspiration broke out upon my brow. I grew impatient with my tools and flung them about. I kicked those senseless pieces of wood, as if that would do them any good. And I thought of Henri’s face when I went back and confessed to this most dismal failure. Then I recovered from my fit of foolishness, and made a vow that I would never leave the job until I had made myself master of it.

So again and again, with stubborn patience now, and like poor old Robinson Crusoe build-



ing the boat which he could never get down to the shore, I grappled with the difficulty of my new trade, and after a whole day's work of the most humiliating character, I at last stood, exhausted in mind and body, and surveyed with an infinite sense of satisfaction one complete cask, which seemed to my eyes a very pretty thing. I rolled it along the sand, laughing and shouting, to where my brother and two men were enveloped in smoke, still busy in making that appalling stench of blubber oil.

Henri said, 'Good man, how many have you done?' And I then told him that this was the only child of my hands. He listened to my tale of trouble with some concern, for we both realised that if I could only make one cask a day, it would take us the best part of a year to produce the two hundred we required, and time was too short for that, even on a desert island! But I assured him that now I had made one the others would come easily enough, and we became cheerful when we ladled our first quart of oil into the barrel.

But then I was disconcerted by a horrible discovery. The cask leaked at every join! The greasy oil trickled out almost as fast as it was ladled in. It was a dismal failure after all! I could have wept salt tears of grief and disgust. If Henri had chaffed me at that time I think we should have quarrelled bitterly, but he was only serious and concerned, and shared my sorrow. However, to cut a long story short, I went to work again, and this time my efforts were rewarded. After further practice I produced six barrels not only workmanlike in appearance, but really sound and watertight. I had become a master of my craft, after so many disappointments and failures. If the worst came to the worst, I shall always be able to earn my bread as a cask-maker.

It was with joy that we put six barrels of first-class oil into our hold with the knowledge that during the next twelve months there would be no difficulty in getting a full cargo of the precious stuff, provided the sea-elephants did not abandon Desolation Island.

I must explain here that the skin of these animals was useless to us. The sea-elephants of Kerguelen are of quite a different species from the fur-seals, and their coarse, short-coated hair is of no value in the market. But their flesh was a new and magnificent source of supply to our larder.

All the way from Boulogne to Desolation Island I had said, 'Wait until we get to Kerguelen, my boys. Then we will have great feasts of seal flesh. It is better than this tinned beef and mutton, I can tell you!' I had made good meals of it before, many a time, on my Antarctic voyage with Dr. Charcot, but my comrades were somewhat afraid of the prospect of such fare.

In Christmas Harbour, however, they took their first meal of it, and it was an enormous success! Henri did the cooking, stewing the seal with onions and good butter from tins. It was very palatable, I assure you. Contrary to general belief, seal meat is neither rank nor fishy. It is a dark meat and a little coarse, perhaps, but in no way offensive. The heart

and liver and brains are especially good. You may imagine Larose when he sat down to such a dish. He was in the seventh heaven of delight, and I believe that he was composing poetry to himself as he abandoned himself to the joy, without any restriction upon his appetite.

We had been very glad to get into the tranquil waters of Christmas Harbour, as we found them when we arrived in fair weather, but as a matter of fact, after twenty-four hours, we discovered that we were in very bad anchorage. We had three anchors dropped, but on the second night they dragged a mile through the black sand when a breeze sprang up. I had been below for a time, and when I came up on deck I was amazed to see where we were. Larose was keeping watch on deck, and I exclaimed :

‘Don’t you see we have dragged, my lad? Why on earth didn’t you shout out?’

‘Captain,’ he replied in his simple, courteous way, ‘I kept my eye on a rock on shore, and it is still there.’

‘Yes,’ I said, and angry as I was I could hardly resist a smile, ‘the rock is still there, but we are not!’

Larose’s faith in all being well so long as the rock remained was very characteristic of him. He had a similar faith in other things, and I think he would have been calm in the midst of an earthquake so long as his own feet were firm upon the ground and his own meal remained to be eaten.

It was at this point in Christmas Harbour to which we had drifted that we found the flagstaff that had been erected in 1893, when the *Eure* came to Kerguelen to take possession of the island for France. There was no flag flying, but the solitary mast gave us a thrill when we saw it. It seemed to be a signal to us from the country that was so many thousands of miles away.

We stood out of Christmas Harbour at ten o’clock one morning and went southward, passing on our starboard a very conspicuous rock which is charted as Sentry Box Island, on account of its peculiar shape, and without

incident we reached Loom Bay and dropped anchor in sixteen fathoms.

We found the bay to differ greatly from the charts, and during our stay here of one month we made a careful plan of it. It is full of 'kelp,' a luxuriant sea-weed. There is a high mountain about half a mile from shore to the northward, and the sparse grass that covers the lower ledge of the rock ceases at about three hundred feet above sea-level; after that there are very scattered patches of lichen to cover the bare sides of the peaks.

Here it was that my men learned that the sea-elephant is not the harmless beast that they imagined. Throughout the night we could hear large numbers of them barking with a strange gruff roar—not unlike wild beasts of the tropical jungles—which I have learnt to imitate with some success, though not with the same power of lungs.

Sitting in our little cabin, or at watch on deck in the darkness of night, it was a peculiar sensation to be under the great black cliffs towering up like the shadows of immense



fortress walls, and to hear those deep barking voices reverberating around as though the beasts were fighting in deadly combat. When we went on shore next day, all was quiet. An intense silence brooded over this part of the island, broken only by the cries of the sea-birds sounding like wailing voices down the wind. But we saw twenty big bull-elephants, upwards of eighteen feet in length, lying on the rocks within ten yards of the sea.

We attacked them with our clubs and with a lance, but they did not yield so easily as the females at Christmas Harbour. We could not kill them, though the blood on the seals, with which we soon became bespattered, bore testimony to the severity of the battle. We returned to the attack with an axe, but things became very warm, for these tough old males were heroes of their tribe, and never turned their backs upon a foe. They kept their giant jaws facing to the enemy, and while we were busy with one of them, the others would waddle forward and dart out their necks, roaring horribly.



Agnès, more emotional than I had ever seen him, had hurried forward, running and flourishing his club, and shouting war-cries. There came into my mind old stories of the Vikings ; this tall, fair Norman lad charging those great elephants of the sea might have been one of those Scandinavians whose deeds have been sung in the saga—Leif the Lucky himself, son of Eric the Red. He was indeed filled with ‘ Berserker rage ’ ; and again, as he went brandishing his stick and shouting, I thought also of Taillefer, the minstrel of Norman William, who, with swinging battle - axe, rushed upon the Saxons at the head of the Conqueror’s knights. While the lust of battle was in his soul he was no longer the gentle sailor who played the accordion, but a very fiend of destruction, and careless of those gaping fiends which sought to devour him.

Jean Bontemps, our sturdy boatswain, was hardly less excited than Agnès, though not so heroic in his appearance or execution.

‘ Let me kill them ! Let me kill them ! ’ he shouted when I was attacked at close

quarters by one of these big beasts, but neither my club nor Bontemps's could knock the life out of the tough old elephant.

It was a dreadful massacre, and the sight of it would shock sensitive people at home who would not hurt a mouse. But remember that we were upon Desolation Island, and had returned to the primitive conditions of Nature. We were not unlike the prehistoric men of the Stone Age attacking those great monsters whose bones are so quiet now in our museums. That herd of sea-elephants, so ungainly, so monstrous, so hideous, with their probosces nosing at us and their tails beating the rocks, and their huge squat bodies crawling after us, was a sight not to be met with in the highways of civilisation, and called to the old brute strength in man by which he became master of the world.

To tell the truth, however, this attack with clubs was too dangerous to ourselves and too clumsy in its method to be adopted by us in future. During that great fight with the twenty bulls the black rocks ran red with

blood, and the place was a shambles. In the end I had to send back for a gun to finish these fierce brutes, and never again did I go seal-hunting without that weapon. But we could never take more than one gun, for I am certain that if our men had been armed in this way they would have killed each other in sheer excitement.

However, on this occasion, we had killed all the twenty seals without suffering any danger ourselves, though that night when we went on board we were utterly exhausted, and of deplorable appearance and uncleanness.

That night a gale blew with tremendous gusts, but next day there was fair weather, and we went to collect the blubber from the dead seals. Foolishly, we again tried to melt the blubber on deck, Henri and I superintending the kettles while the men were on shore cutting up the seals. There was once more a scene of stench and filth on board the *J. B. Charcot*, and, as a horrible climax, a flame caught the floating oil, and it flared up in great tongues of fire which scared us mightily.

The men also were frightened when they saw this glare of light on the ship, and we heard them shouting to us. My brother and I kept our presence of mind, jammed the lids upon the bubbling cauldrons, and threw buckets of water on deck, so that the danger was soon past. Obviously, however, the deck of our ship was the last place in which to prepare seal oil, and we transferred the kettles and furnace to the shore.

For the next ten days I was hard at work making casks, and I found that I could put them together at the rate of four a day, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. Afterwards I became so expert that I could make fifteen and upwards in a single day. Twenty, however, were enough for some time, and having produced that number, I put my tools away. We then decided, as it was good weather, to go for a little expedition, and having put out the fire in the cook's galley, we lowered the boats and rowed to Long Island. Hundreds of seals were on the rocks here, but we contented ourselves with killing only a

few, and came back from our journey with boat-loads of blubber.

At Loom Bay we busied ourselves in building on the beach what we called in our pride the Oil Factory. This was merely a rough hut to shelter our melting-furnace. It was little but a roof made of planks and seal-skins, with a chimney, but it looked very fine to us. The skins, as I have already said, had no commercial value, so that ladies who shudder at the idea of using seal-skins as building material, need not be alarmed at our extravagance.

For ten days we worked hard melting down our new stock of blubber, and then, taking Agnès with me in our lightest flat-bottomed boat, I set out on a short expedition northward round Lucky Point into Breakwater Bay and Clump Bay. Most of the names of this part of the coast, by the way, have been given by American sealers who have paid occasional visits. In Clump Bay we dragged our boat on shore and went inland on foot, the chief objects of our quest being to find coal, of

which we were in urgent need for our oil factory, and to put new information on the chart.

About two miles from the beach we found a stretch of white sand, surrounded by a natural wall of rock, which has been called 'The Garden,' for, seen from the distance, it looks exactly like that. Pushing forward, we reached a group of curiously round hills called the Beehives, and were now round at the back of Loom Bay, where our ship lay at anchor. Tremendous gusts of wind volleyed from the south-east through a deep gully, which on the chart is called the Devil's Punch Bowl, and it was easy to see that this storm-swept land could never be covered with vegetation.

We saw no trees, but only bare rocks and rugged hills, and walking was a slow and tiring task, especially in the high wind. I can well believe Sir James Clarke Ross when he says that one of his men was actually blown into the sea when going ashore on Kerguelen, and that he only saved himself by lying flat on the ground. These squalls are called

‘woolleys’ or ‘willy-waws’ by the sealers. When Agnès and I stumbled on mile after mile over that rock-strewn ground, my eyes were busy with the scenery that lay around us, and once again my soul was impressed by the solitary and desolate grandeur of it. At one time Nature must have played wild pranks here, and Kerguelen must have been one of the cauldrons of the primæval world when the earth was being shaped in the womb of Time.

Vast volcanic eruptions had thrown up those great peaks and plateaux of basalt and dolerite, and then, ever since, the wind and rain and frost and snow had been at work carving them grotesquely, furrowing the face of them with deep scars, undermining the projecting ledges, digging deep caverns, splitting them with huge cracks and crevasses, carving crowns upon the tops of the peaks, planing the table-tops, and polishing some of the long smooth slopes of the hills. Here and there on the cliff walls were single pillar-shaped rocks curiously carved, and looking from a distance



exactly like giant sentinels keeping watch and ward over the battlements. Upon the higher slopes were great boulders resting upon or between flat rocks in such a way that it seemed impossible for them to have got into such a position except by the agency of human ingenuity and mechanical force.

Undoubtedly, in the first days of Kerguelen, before history was written or men had appeared on earth, many of the great mountain ranges of Desolation Island had been unbroken walls of basalt, but continually great fragments have been split off, fretting the skyline, and tumbling in disorder adown the slopes to form new peaks and plateaux and terraced ridges.

It seemed to me as I wandered with my comrade in this wild rock-country, casting my eyes upward ever and anon to watch the snow-capped summits of the far mountains, that superstitious men in the olden time could have believed this place to be an abode of demons and the haunt of dreadful monsters.

Our search for coal was not wonderfully successful. Agnès and I were both on the

look-out for the black treasure. Now and again I stooped and picked up a stone which looked remarkably like the best black 'nuggets,' and some of these I pocketed to take back to the ship to test as fuel. We had taken with us ten days' provisions, consisting of biscuit, tinned meat and jam, and a small spirit-lamp for making hot cocoa, but having seen the desolate character of the land, and having noted and filled in on my chart many topographical features hitherto unmapped, I returned with Agnès to Clump Bay, at the end of two days, and found our rowing boat on the beach. On our return journey to the *J. B. Charcot* I made many soundings and observations in Breakwater Bay, and I should judge it to afford good anchorage. On board our little ship I produced my specimens of 'coal,' which Henri agreed to be very promising, and we put them into the galley fire. But my comrades had the laugh of me, for they only became red-hot and did not burn at all!

There are no trees on Desolation Island,

and without coal our oil factory would cease smoking and smelling, which no doubt would please the penguins, but would be fatal to our own ambitions. I had overcome the difficulty of cask-making, and we had already challenged sea-elephants to mortal combat with the odds on our side, but we should be undone if we ran short of fuel. It was therefore an essential thing that we should search for coal and be successful in our search.

Henri, who has a keener sense for geology than I, had volunteered to go out himself on this quest, and early one morning he set out alone from Loom Bay, after being rowed across the harbour by one of the boys. He was away for many hours, and when the rose-tinted clouds faded out of the evening sky and darkness fell, I became very anxious for his safety. I blamed myself for having let him go alone, and conjured up many dreadful visions of him lying maimed or mangled at the bottom of a jagged ledge of rock or in one of those deep gullies, which made a solitary walk so perilous. It would be a terrible

thing if Henri were to meet with such an accident beyond the call of help.

I had a lamp hoisted on our main-mast to serve as a beacon, and at last I was thankful beyond words to hear his voice shouting for the boat. It was then eleven o'clock, and I had almost given him up as lost. When he came on board he was so exhausted that he could hardly stand, having tramped all those long hours across the rocks and over the mountain ridges and deep down into the grim boulder-strewn valleys with a gun over his shoulder—a heavy weight on such a walk—and with a canvas bag containing provisions for several days, in case of need. But his day's toil was not without results, for, with his keen vision for likely places in which coal might be deposited, he had run across some open seams and brought back some good specimens. He had also shot several ducks as a present to Esnault.

We immediately put his specimens to the test, and I had a feeling this time that it might be Henri's turn to see them turn to stone.

But fortunately they burned fairly well, though the quality was not very good. The seam from which it was taken will probably have to 'mature' for a few thousands of years more before it becomes of any commercial value. But it served us until we got stuff of a better quality on another part of the island, though it was so far away that we could not afford the time and trouble to fetch much of it.

Altogether we found about twenty coal deposits in different parts of Kerguelen, and this was the result of an exhaustive survey, so that, though the quality is never very good, it should prove of value in melting blubber. The best quality was near Sandy Cove, where, during a stay which I shall describe later, we burned about six tons. It was of a peculiar quality because, although perfectly black and shining like the best house coal of Europe, one might rub it against one's hand without any blackness coming off. This is due to its being 'new' coal, as geological time is reckoned.

I remember that when I returned from my voyage and talked about the coal, a lady of my acquaintance was exceedingly sceptical as to its existence.

‘You have told us, Captain,’ she said, ‘that no trees grow on Desolation Island. It is impossible then to believe in the presence of coal, which, as every child knows, is the carbon of old wood.’

Her logic was perfect as far as it went, but it did not go very far. It is perfectly true that there are no trees on Kerguelen—at the present day—but it is equally certain that in prehistoric times, after the volcanic forces had thrown up the mountains and piled peak on peak, there were luxuriant forests on this land and its adjacent islands. The climatic conditions of the world have undergone many changes before man began to test them with his little scientific instruments!

As the coal we first discovered was at too great a distance, we searched in places nearer to the coast so that we might not have so far to carry it to our rowing boats. In Seal

Bay, the next opening southward from Loom Bay, we found a seam of coal which was very brilliant in appearance and looked like Cardiff coal. We rubbed our hands in glee and, having returned to the ship for tools, set out for a heavy day's work with shovels, picks and blasting powder. It was arduous toil and we were not expert coal diggers, and we had to be very careful to avoid being crushed under the heavy masses which we loosened in the face of the cliff. But after many hours' work we had a pile of huge lumps around us, and each of us shouldered as big a piece as strength would permit. So we marched, or rather staggered and stumbled, under those burdens to our boat, and then rowed back some miles to the *J. B. Charcot*, tired but triumphant.

Our triumph was once more chastened. After trying the coal, we found that it contained over thirty per cent. of silicate of iron, and the fire was soon put out by the quantity of clinkers that accumulated.

I ought perhaps to make it clear to those



of my readers who imagine that coal is always deep in the bowels of the earth, that here in Desolation Island the seams we found and worked were exposed to view, generally in the side of some deep cutting worn by a stream. Of course, we had neither the time nor the experience to search for or to obtain coal that lay below the surface.

It was about this time, when we were in and around Loom Bay, that Agnès had an adventure which nearly robbed us of a good, brave, and trustworthy comrade. It was his great delight and pride to be entrusted with a gun, with which he went out to shoot a duck or two. On this day he went in a boat with Larose, who rowed him across to the beach and waited there, resting on his oars, perfectly contented in his dreamy way to listen to the lap of the water and the voices of the sea-birds while Agnès went ashore and wandered away in search of his game.

After some time, he heard Agnès shouting. But Larose was in a reverie—perhaps he was dreaming of stewed duck—and did not pay

any attention to the noise from his comrade. The shouts continued, and Larose became a little annoyed at such persistent interruption of his valuable thoughts. Again the shouts came to him, and he answered back, 'All right, my friend, I'm coming. Don't be in such a deuce of a hurry,' or words to that effect.

He took his oars and rowed lazily towards the spot where Agnès had landed, and then, as he drew nearer, the peculiar note of Agnès's voice startled the simple fellow, and it began to dawn upon his mind that his comrade was in serious trouble.

To do Larose justice—and I think I have chaffed him enough—he was, in spite of his simplicity, a fine fellow and as brave as a lion and of an affectionate and loyal character. Directly it came to him that Agnès needed his help, he sprang out of the boat and ran about searching for him. But to his dismay, and though still hearing Agnès's voice, growing fainter now and more agonised, he could not see a trace of the lad himself. It was

twilight, and the black rocks were in half-darkness and the pools of water between them were overshadowed. But by the sound of the voice he drew near to the right place. And then he saw Agnès, or rather part of him. That poor fellow had disappeared, except for his head and shoulders. He had stuck up to the armpits in a mud-hole and was slowly sinking to a dreadful death. His face was ghastly white and his eyes were eloquent of terror, for, in spite of his courage, it was a horrible thing to meet a death like this. Larose understood the meaning of his shouts now. He took one of the oars of the boat and held it out to his comrade, who was just able to grasp it. Then Larose, roused now to his full strength, hauled him out and rescued him from what seemed like his doom.

It appeared that Agnès had gone wandering with his gun in search of wild-fowl and seen a broad, smooth, shining patch of ground under a rocky ridge, which attracted him because of its peculiar appearance. He strolled across it and immediately began to sink in a bog.

He was unable to extricate his lower limbs from this liquid soil, but he had the presence of mind to place his gun horizontally between his arms, which undoubtedly was the means of saving his life. The two boys came back to the ship and told their story, Agnès very white in the face after his awful shock, and his clothes caked with mud. Henri and I were much concerned, and Henri especially was very angry with Jean Bontemps, who had been keeping watch on deck.

‘Good heavens, man,’ said my brother, ‘didn’t you hear poor Agnès shouting? What had happened to your ears?’

‘I did hear him calling,’ said Bontemps, ‘but I thought he was singing, Captain.’

This was the last stroke to Agnès, who had a very good singing voice, as I have already said in the course of this narrative.

‘Singing!’ he said, with great indignation. ‘He thought I was singing! Why, I was just bellowing!’

As a matter of fact, we found afterwards that there was a real excuse for Bontemps.

We discovered that when we shouted on shore our voices went echoing in a peculiar way among the rocks, so that they had a wailing singing sound when heard at a little distance.

The mud-hole in which poor Agnès was nearly swallowed up was only one of many in Desolation Island. They abound in various parts of the island and in the most unexpected places. We always had to be very careful in avoiding them when tramping on expeditions to the interior. I had heard of them before, because whalers and sealers have told stories of shipmates who have gone ashore to explore the district around their anchorage and have never come back again, the belief being that they had been buried alive in these 'sink-holes,' as they are sometimes called.

Another cause of danger is the strange way in which the crest of the rocks has broken away, forming pits or holes sometimes to the depth of forty or fifty feet. A false step, and a tumble into one of these *oubliettes* would cause the instant death of any unfortunate traveller. We were lucky, however, in dis-

covering many ponds among the rocks, which had been scooped out by the action of frost or weather, or by volcanic disturbances, and filled with good fresh water, crystal clear and very cold. Some of these ponds were almost big enough to deserve the name of lakes, and they provided us with drinking water and enabled us to replenish our tanks in the ship.

I must not forget to mention here a peculiar plant which we found on the lower ledges of the rocks among the narrow belts of coarse herbage. It is called the Kerguelen cabbage, and has a tough, thick coat growing along the ground and then shooting up with a top of thick broad leaves. We gathered a good deal of this plant and made use of it in our cooking, because we had a great need of vegetable food to keep our blood pure. But the Kerguelen cabbage is not an ideal green-stuff. We had to boil it twice before we could eat it, for it has a most rank and bitter taste, very much like the most powerful horse-radish. In the first boiling the water becomes of a dark yellow colour, but in the second boiling

it is fairly clear and the cabbage then becomes eatable. We made sauces with it, and chopped it up with our tinned meats for the stew-pot.

I am bound to confess that, in spite of the hardships of life on this desert island, we kept a very good larder, for there is a great variety of bird life on Kerguelen, and some of us were good shots. These birds, too, were worthy of attention for other reasons than the satisfaction of our hunger. During our Robinson Crusoe life they provided us with a continual source of interest, and their presence relieved the desolate and inhuman loneliness which otherwise might have been intolerable.

It was indeed a paradise of birds, and their voices soon became familiar to our ears. Even at night one could hear them in the tremulous darkness, and some of their cries had a strangely human note, plaintive and pitiful sometimes, as though children were crying in distress.

The whale-bird, for instance, is seldom seen in the daytime, and then it seems confused by the light, flying in an irregular, uncertain



way. But when darkness falls, the hillsides, which have been quiet and desolate during the day, are thronged with these birds, which swoop about in short, swift, darting flights, as though a legion of bats were in the air, and all the time make a loud cooing noise, something like the note of pigeons but more staccato in sound.

The diver is another night bird, and it has a peculiar cry like the mewling and miauling of a cat. There were times, as I stood on deck in the night watch listening to this bird, when I could almost have believed that I was back in Paris in a room under the attics where the cats were on the prowl and indulging in their witches' chorus. This mewling bird is of peculiar appearance, having a blue-black head and white throat, a heavy body in proportion to its spreading wings, and a naked stomach, uncovered by any down or feathers.

There are many other peculiar birds on Kerguelen, but I think my readers will prefer to follow our further adventures rather than read natural history.

## CHAPTER VI

WE decided to get away from Loom Bay, as it was by no means safe anchorage in that harbour, and at each gale we feared that the cable might break and the *J. B. Charcot* drift helplessly on to the rocks. Before leaving, however, I went on another expedition inland with Larose. Rowing off from our ship, we sounded down Centre Bay and then crossed over to Red Cliff, so called from the presence of ferrous oxide in the basalt. It will be easily understood that in a country where the prevailing tone is black, a faint tinge of red is startling, and although this cliff was not very rich in that colour, yet in the glow of the sunlight it justifies its name.

Close by we found a freshwater lake hitherto uncharted. We also went to Bear Up Bay, which we found to be of a totally different shape to that marked on our chart

and extending to a far greater length, broadening out at the top like a mushroom. At the end of this bay we discovered a very high mountain, forming no doubt the furthest spur of a great range of tumbled peaks rising to the summit of Mount Richards, which is 4000 feet high, with glacial ravines dug down the eastern sides of the mountain slopes to White Bay.

This trip took us two days, and shortly afterwards—that is, on 25th April—we hoisted anchor on the *J. B. Charcot* and set sail, having been in Loom Bay since 12th March. It was then summer, and we had had a few fine days, though the thermometer never rose higher than 12° centigrade. But when we got out of the bay early in the morning, a heavy snow squall overtook us, whitening our deck and rigging so that we looked like an old-fashioned Christmas card, but without the sentimental greeting attached thereto. We rounded Cox Point and found a heavy sea breaking over hidden reefs.

It was an ugly position, and Henri and I

became anxious when night came and we stood very near to Schultz Reef. We did not know whether it was best to stand out in the open sea for the night, but finally we decided to sail ahead, and when it was pitch dark we anchored at the entrance of Pigeon Harbour. We had made a fair sweep westward and southward round the mainland of Desolation Island, passing, by sheer luck, between many islands scattered out to sea and all around this jagged coast, through the beds of rock-weed first passed by Captain James Cook in the *Resolution* a century and a half ago, and down into Hillsborough Bay on the west side of the Jackman Peninsula.

During that trip we had, while the light remained with us, a broad survey of the scenery of Kerguelen rising in the interior to great heights of tumbled rocks and sharp-edged peaks as we looked across our starboard bows to the western side, while away eastward the range of high cliffs, with Mount Campbell as their highest point, formed a great headland thrust forward to the sea.

On the following day we rode into the entrance of Gazelle Basin, which was to be our harbour for several months, and went ashore by Sandy Cove. Here immediately, as though he had foreknowledge of it, my brother's quick eyes discovered a seam of coal. This time it proved to be of good quality, burning well, and without many clinkers. It was a glorious find, and it was this which decided us to make our headquarters in this anchorage.

Accordingly, on the following day, I got my boys into the boat again, and with a rope to the bows of our little ship, we towed her slowly into Gazelle Basin and dropped her anchors at Sandy Cove. On our chart there was marked a depot which had been left by the commander of the *Eure*. It was marked by a cairn, and naturally our first thought was to find its whereabouts. This was as easy as if we had had a sign-post.

It was an hour of keen excitement when we came across these relics of former occupation, and we were as happy as children

who have unearthed a treasure trove. The weather had not left these stores undisturbed and undamaged although they were buried beneath a pile of stones. Five casks there were, all rotten, and the blankets and clothing which had been packed into them had been made utterly worthless by years of rain and snow. When we took them out they were neatly folded, but each fold was a rent, and they fell to shreds and patches in our hands. The biscuits in other barrels had all been washed together into a pulpy mass, and had a very sour smell. The rotten wood of the casks themselves had long moss upon them. A pile of tinned food had escaped damage, partly by having been tarred all over.

We opened one of them and tasted the beef. It was perfectly good, but fortunately we had no need to take any for our own use. So we carefully replaced the cases, and, as a little contribution to any future adventurers who might come ashore here, perhaps in a bad plight after storm or shipwreck, we left a box containing needles and twine and matches,

the two things most necessary to mariners in distress. Because, of course, if you have the wherewithal to make a fire, and a tent, and clothing, you have good reason for thankfulness.

As soon as we had settled down in Gazelle Bay, we began to work the coal in order to obtain a good store for our oil factory. It was about two hundred yards from the water, and the seam had dug a deep hole in the cliff so that it had a projecting ledge, underneath which were the coal seams. While my brother was superintending the preliminaries of his work, Larose and I walked to Observatory Bay—a one-day tramp across the mainland which divides Hillsborough Bay from Royal Sound. It was here that the English expedition had come in 1874 to observe the transit of Venus, and afterwards, in 1902-3, a German expedition with three scientists and seven men in a ship called the *Gans*. One of the scientists, Dr. Drygalski, had climbed the summit of one of the peaks, and built a cairn in which he had put a



bottle containing a message. Larose and I discovered this, and read the words of the message, which states that the ascent had been made and that the mount had been called Drygalski Berg. We also found a grave marked with a stone to the memory of Dr. Engensberger, and two other graves with wooden planks upon which had been carved some Chinese characters. It was a strange and solemn thing to find the record of this tragedy in that wilderness of rocks. I knew that Dr. Engensberger was reported to have died of berri-berri, brought by Chinese upon a sealing vessel. Shortly afterwards we made a still more interesting discovery. We had tramped for many miles among the rocks when Larose suddenly called out, as though moved by a strong excitement:

‘Captain!’ he said, ‘Captain! look yonder.’

‘What’s the matter?’ I said.

‘It’s a house!’ said Larose, as though such a thing were a miracle on Desolation Island. I looked to where he pointed, and there, sure enough, were the four walls of a little build-

ing put up by human hands. I knew at once that we had found the headquarters of the German expedition which had come out under the command of Dr. Drygalski to make astronomical and other observations in the year 1902.

I suppose my readers will hardly understand the emotion that gripped us at the sight of that little dwelling-place. Robinson Crusoe, after some months of loneliness on his desert island, had suddenly seen the imprint of a human foot in the sand, and all lovers of that immortal romance will remember how they shared his thrill at the discovery. We too were on a desert island. For months now we had not seen a sign of human handicraft, but only the rock fortresses built by the great forces of Nature, and the mountain ranges thrown up in volcanic cataclysms. For months we had wandered, far from civilisation, and it seemed to us (though we knew otherwise) that no human beings except ourselves had ever set foot upon these desolate shores or lived in its barren solitudes.

But here before us stood, four-square to the winds of heaven, a house, the sign of civilised life, the silent proof that other men had once come in a ship to Kerguelen, that human voices had once echoed across the bay, that they, whoever they might have been, had had similar adventures to our own, had gazed out upon the grand and awful scenery of this island, had listened with beating hearts to the unbroken silence, or to the sullen moaning of the storm-winds and the whistling of the 'willie-waws.' No sight could have been more beautiful, more fascinating, more thrilling to our seamen's eyes than the view of that small house which had stood against the fierce squalls and the furious gales of this coast, long after the men who had built it had departed over the sea. Something like a mist of tears obscured my eyes for a moment, for this house was the shrine of many memories and a tale of romance.

Larose and I went up to it silently. There was something a little uncanny, something haunting to the imagination, in this

deserted dwelling-place. I remembered old fairy-stories told round hearthsides in Brittany of travellers coming upon such a hut in lonely, goblin-haunted forests. Should we find a dragon sleeping across the threshold, or a witch-hag boiling men's bones in a cauldron?

Seriously, there was a sense of old-world romance in the discovery. As we drew near, we saw that though the walls stood, the weather had played havoc with the building. Its windows stared at us with blind eyes out of hollow sockets. The panes had been broken by the gusts which had rattled against them and buffeted them with brutal strength. The roof had been smashed in and was full of gaping holes. The wind even now was whistling through cracks in the walls. The German house was falling into ruins.

Larose and I went to the door and lifted the latch and walked in. Then I gazed around, drawing my breath at the strange sight which met my eyes. Here, many years before, my predecessors in exploration had made a home, and had surrounded themselves

with the comforts of civilised life. Their furniture was still here, tables and chairs and iron bedsteads. But how strangely all had been left! It was as though they had been disturbed in their life by the warning of some attack, and had fled without a moment's time to carry any of their goods away.

Indeed, it was as though the enemy had fallen upon them suddenly, as though some dreadful scene of brutal savagery had taken place within these walls before the men had been carried off as prisoners of war, and all things had been abandoned as they stood. It was strange! Here were the cooking-pots and the plates and dishes, just as the unknown dwellers in this house had sat down to their last meal. But for some reason that meal had been untouched. In the iron pots was a stew of some kind, thickly covered with mould and the breeding-place of myriads of bacilli. The plates and dishes contained food of the same kind, sour and mouldy and evil-looking. I had an involuntary shudder at the sight of it

There were other provisions, abandoned by the men who had brought them ashore. There were many kinds of tinned meat, and some days later I sampled them. They were quite good to eat, and, as I shall have to tell, I lived upon them for some time, but they were almost tasteless, and for the life of me I could not have distinguished beef from mutton, or chicken from ham.

A frightful and sickening stench pervaded the hut so that I could hardly stay there. I found that it came from a dish of peas lying on one of the tables. They were quite rotten, and the smell that came from them was indescribable. I took up the dish, and carrying it outside, hurled it away to the rocks where the wind could have free play with those pestilent peas. Then I went back to the house again, and with Larose explored still further into the mysteries of this deserted dwelling. The most curious thing was to find the clothing of the former inhabitants. They had not carried away this personal property, and now, still hanging upon

nails, or flung about the floor or lying across the chain bedsteads, were jackets and trousers, and old socks and shirts, just as if those German explorers had jumped out of bed and fled away in nakedness. But when the twilight crept into the hut, those clothes seemed to assume human shape, and for all the world they looked like dead men hanging upon hooks.

It was evident, however, that those German scientists had dwelt here in comfort greater than that enjoyed by the crew of the *J. B. Charcot*. They had put up with loneliness, but not with any lack of luxury. I found hundreds of bottles for wine and spirits, but none with any drop of liquor in them. I do not think I have ever seen such a stack of empty bottles about one house. The Germans had left their food, but they had certainly quenched their thirst before abandoning their hut. It was disappointing to me that I could not drink to their good health!

I have said that the hut was deserted.



Yet there were living creatures here. When our footsteps crossed the threshold, there was a scampering and a hurrying and a scurrying of many little pattering feet. Hundreds of mice had made a dwelling-place within these four walls, and had reared many fine families within their shelter. These creatures had grown grossly fat upon the refuse scattered over the floors and tables, although curiously enough they had not touched the meal once prepared for German scientists. They seemed to prefer to gorge upon the papers that made a litter everywhere—German illustrated papers and German pamphlets and old letters. I stamped upon the floor and made those little beasts run away to hiding-places from which they blinked at us not very much afraid.

When Henri came afterwards to the hut he was much interested in these papers, for he reads German easily, and he was glad to find a history of the Franco-Prussian War, which he took back with him to the ship. Often at night he would sit reading it for hours and

translating it as he read for my benefit. It was instructive to get the German point of view of the great conflict with France, and there were many thrilling and amusing stories of French and German soldiers. That book beguiled many an evening on the *J. B. Charcot*, and was a notable addition to our little library.

It was Henri's idea, I think, that it would be a good and serviceable work if I were to spend some time in the German house tidying up all the disorder of it and putting it shipshape, and mending its broken places. At that time it occurred to us that we might beach the *J. B. Charcot* for a while and make the hut our own headquarters, but in any case it would be a good thing to make it weather-tight again, as it might prove of great comfort to other voyagers happening to come to this spot. If left to itself, it would inevitably fall into ruins beyond repair. I readily fell in with the idea, and one morning started off in a boat carrying linoleum to mend the roof and

floor, tools of various kinds, a gun, and a bag of provisions.

I was eight days alone in the German house as 'builder and decorator,' and it was certainly the loneliest time in my life. It seemed as if there were no other persons alive in the world except myself. I could imagine myself to be 'the last man on earth.' For eight days I heard no human voice, nor any sound of human activity except my own. Surrounded by wild country where the sea-birds dwelt, and in that hut which had been abandoned by its human occupants, but where the mice frolicked about by day and night, I was thrown absolutely upon my own resources and my own thoughts, and was a real Robinson Crusoe, taking my meals in loneliness, without even the companionship of a speaking parrot! Yet I can honestly say that, save once, I had no fear, nor, save once again, any of those uncanny, superstitious, uneasy sensations which trouble the souls of many men when they are quite alone. I have

strong and steady nerves. Superstition is not one of my ailments, and I do not give a rein to morbid imaginings.

I was very busy too, for there was an immense amount of work to do in making order out of chaos. I shifted all the mouse-chewed papers from the floor and arranged those which had not been too badly damaged. I folded up the clothes and put them away in neat bundles. I packed up the tinned provisions, and generally played the housewife in that domicile. Then I turned my attention to the roof and floor. They had, as I have said, been badly damaged, and the roof especially was in sad need of repair. It was not easy labour for one pair of hands, but, cutting up strips of linoleum, I nailed them across the planks. It was the best I could do, for I had no spare wood, and it would at least give the hut a new lease of life. At night, after my day's work, I used to be quite ready to stretch myself on one of the iron bedsteads, but often I could not get a wink of sleep, for at that time the fat mice used

to become frisky and raced and scampered about in a most irritating way.

I must now tell how one evening I was scared more than I have ever been before. I have said that I am not nervous, but I confess that on this occasion my nerves became like fiddle-strings, and my heart jumped into my mouth.

I was preparing a meal for myself and was busy with pots and pans. Twilight had crept into the hut, and outside there was that brooding silence which comes before the night, when the day birds are settling down to rest and the night birds have not yet begun to wake. I was humming a little song to myself, when I seemed to hear a slight noise, as of some one moving outside. I suppose one's senses get quickened like those of a wild animal when one is living alone. Anyhow, just as an animal is startled in its lair, I held a plate or something poised in my hand and listened intently. But nothing further seemed to stir, and of course I knew that I was as utterly alone as a mortal man

may be. I went on with my work, but again I stopped, and a sense of fear—a fear of unknown things—possessed me in spite of myself. Surely something was moving, very stealthily, outside my door?

Again I pooh-poohed the idea, trying to get a grip upon my foolish imagination. Then for some reason or other my eyes were attracted to the window with its broken panes, and I had a horrible sensation. It seemed to me that a face was looking in at me!

It was a white face with staring eyes. It was gazing at me curiously, that pallid, dreadful visage. Then it disappeared, and I heard that stealthy noise which had first disturbed me. I could hardly breathe; I seemed to be choking. I was as though turned to stone. But again I struggled with myself.

It was impossible! I must have been deluded by some trick of light, or by some fantastic prank of my own senses. Perhaps I was going mad. Perhaps those days of loneliness had been too much for me. I stood still, trying to summon up a laugh to dispel

this stupid fear. And then—once more—appeared that white face at the window, that ghostly face with its staring eyes in which there was a flash of yellow light.

I seized something—I do not know what—and with a strangled cry rushed towards the door. At least I would see the thing clearly before I went quite mad. As I sprang across the threshold with my weapon raised, I saw a white form slouch away into the shadows. It was a beast-like form, though I had never heard of beasts on Desolation Island, except the sea-elephants and the whales. I followed swiftly, and the white form sprang away from me and out into the open. Then I saw it clearly. It was a dog! An Eskimo dog, with white fur and a plump well-fed body. I was as startled as if I had seen a real ghost, for it was hardly less surprising to find a dog on Desolation Island. During the next day or two it kept within earshot of the German house, and watched my movements from afar as though deeply interested in my appearance.



I tried a hundred times to entice it into friendliness. I would walk quietly towards it calling it endearing names. 'Good old fellow! Good boy! Come along then, old friend!' But when I came within twenty paces or so the white dog would bound away, and nothing that I could do would induce it to be comradely. During our stay in this part of the island the Eskimo dog followed us about, though always standing aloof, and we saw it many miles away from the German house. It lived at Elizabeth Bay by hunting the rabbits which abounded in Kerguelen, and it was the last of its tribe. We found the bones of other dogs, showing that at one time it had had companions. Poor lonely fellow, we pitied it and would have willingly adopted it as a new messmate in the place of our lost Patrick. But it had returned to the wild state of its ancestors and was shy of human-kind, though prompted by half-forgotten memories to draw near enough to watch those strange beings who had come to disturb its solitude.

Among other things that I found in and around the German house during my lonely sojourn there were wires and batteries for electric light, a tin of petrol for a motor-boat, of which I found the screw and pieces of wood, a box used for holding scientific instruments, and a paper written by Dr. Drygalski, saying that on a certain date Dr. Engensberger had died—‘doing his duty for Science and the Fatherland.’

In my small way I had done my duty also, and leaving the house in spick and span order, I started to tramp back to Sandy Cove. It was a perilous adventure, and I nearly joined Dr. Engensberger in that bourne whence no traveller returns.

A soaking rain fell hissing on the rocks as I went forward, rushing down the slopes and gurgling in the gullies. Then a heavy fog closed about me, and I could see only dimly across the range of black hills, all of which looked exactly alike, and most grim and brutal in their darkness. Needless to say, I lost my road, and soon was wandering

helplessly without any sense of direction. Yet hour after hour I stumbled on, slipping down on moist rocks, lurching over loose boulders, staggering into deep gullies.

I began to have a horrible suspicion that I should never again see my brother Henri and the crew of the *J. B. Charcot*. Never again should I sit in that cosy little cabin watching Larose's placid face over a dish of steaming seal flesh, or reading Horace in the dim light of our oil-lamp. I was wet through to the skin, bruised and leg-weary and very hungry. I had only a few biscuits with me, and occasionally I nibbled at them to keep up my strength, but with the rather awful thought that I should have to husband these resources in case another day, or other days, should pass and find me still wandering over these mist-enshrouded rocks.

Then evening came and darkness, and I found a cave in which to pass the long hours of that horrible night. It was only a hole in a rock, but large enough for me to get a little shelter. Not much however. Wet as

I was, I became still wetter as the hours passed. All through the night water dripped upon me from the rock roof until the water-drops froze into icicles and the cold became intense. There were thirteen hours of night, and for all that time I endured an agony of suffering until it seemed to me that I should go mad. I understood something of the agonies of prisoners in the Middle Ages entombed alive in such a hole as this.

When daylight came I found that the mist was clearing, and that on the previous day I had been wandering in the wrong direction. I was able to find my bearings, and after a painful walk I managed to get back to Sandy Cove and to get on board the boat. I was utterly exhausted and almost delirious. The adventure had not only been a severe bodily strain, but I was faint for want of food, having eaten nothing but one or two biscuits for twenty-four hours.

It was now the month of May, and we had a gale lasting with hardly any intervals for thirty days. It is almost impossible to give

any idea of the violence of those storms, or of the extreme discomfort which they caused us to suffer. We soon became familiar with, but never reconciled to, the infernal characteristics of Kerguelen weather. First, the wind would come sweeping from the north with a deep and sullen roaring like the rush of a giant squadron of infuriated beasts, and hurry the sea onward in its course in a vast and awful swell, which broke its back upon the reefs and the jagged coast-line. Then suddenly, but with unfailing and periodical regularity, the wind would jump many points of the compass and pounce upon us from the south-west with a new access of elemental energy.

This was the most evil hour of the incessant gale, for this south-westerly squall would bring a new sea with it, and the two great tides of the old sea and the new sea would meet in deadly rivalry until there was a chaos of crashing, struggling, writhing, and boiling waters, as though hell were let loose upon the ocean and had thrown the bed-rock of the sea

floor into a new convulsion. This happened day after day for weeks; first the northerly bluster, then the south-westerly volley firing, then the seething cauldron of the rock-strewn seas. Fortunately we lay very snug in Gazelle Basin, and although the gales raged around us and the noise of them dinned our ears, and the sea lashed furiously past the harbour mouth, the little ship held to its moorings, and only the shuddering of her timbers told of the strain upon her proud spirit.

On the 1st of June, when there was a temporary spell of fair weather—not idyllic, you understand, yet tranquil in comparison to the howling gales—I started out once more for an inland adventure of exploration. This time I took Agnès with me. I always found him a handy fellow and an agreeable companion. He was more intelligent than the ordinary seaman and took a keen interest in his surroundings, and had a quiet wisdom of his own which enabled us to carry on a pleasant conversation as we trudged on the long trail together. He was also very expert

in the handling of the flat-bottomed boat in which we did our coasting work.

After leaving the boat, one of us was to be burdened with a bag containing provisions for several days, a change of clothes for each man, a spirit-lamp, a small compass, matches in a tin, a portion of the chart of Kerguelen (which we had cut into strips) rolled up in a small iron tube, and knives. The other would carry the tent, sleeping-bags made of sailcloth, with blankets sewed inside, so that it was impervious to water, two bamboo sticks for the tent-pole, and two pairs of sea-boots.

But that night we hauled the boat on shore and pitched our camp, arranging our stores around us in a tidy fashion. Sometimes on our journey we used to make a house with the boat propped upon walls of turf thrown up with the shovel, with a little door through which we could creep into our dwelling-place. But on our first night's rest the tent was sufficient for our needs, and in the silent solitude we prepared for a little meal.

I then made a disagreeable discovery. We



had forgotten to bring with us the spirit for the lamp! Perhaps that will not seem very dreadful to my readers, but I assure you that it is not a pleasant thing to be deprived of the means of making a hot drink and of warming up one's victuals when one goes a-wandering on a desert island where the wind rattles one's bones and chills one's blood, and when the nights are miserably cold.

I thought of Agnès, and hardly liked the idea of taking him further after this loss. Yet I should have been profoundly disappointed at turning back, and was prepared to face the journey in spite of this additional discomfort. To test Agnès and give him a chance of beating a retreat if he cared, I pretended to get very angry, and said that we had better return at once. But Agnès rose to the occasion with a fine spirit.

‘As far as I am concerned,’ he said, ‘I don’t mind going without a hot drink. I would rather push on, now that we have started.’

I was rejoiced to hear that, and said ‘All right. So be it,’ with a feeling of gratitude to

this good fellow who had the true explorer's pride.

Early next morning, therefore, and before daybreak, we got into our flat-bottomed boat and rowed across the dark waters until light glimmered in the sky, and the night birds fluttered away to their hiding-place, and the day birds awoke upon the rocks and rose in flocks with their shrill cries. For a wonder it was a beautiful day, and Agnès and I, alone in the splendour of it, on the glistening waterway, felt as happy as mud-larks. We passed near Freshwater Lake and under the cliffs of high mountains down which the water from melted snow came tumbling in foaming cascades. We went to the end of Irish Bay, and hauling our boat on shore, slept there another night, making the best of our cold victuals of biscuit and tinned meat.

On the following day we left our boat and, carrying our tent and bags, walked for seven miles across a flat moraine until we arrived in front of a great, uncharted glacier and a high mountain range. There was no pass

through which we could find a way, but we decided not to be balked by the mountain and to take it by a frontal attack. It was a stiff, steep climb over those jagged peaks and sharp ridges and giant boulders. All the streams were frozen as hard as iron, and we suffered terribly from thirst until our tongues were parched and our lips dried.

We walked until night without drinking, and we had no desire for conversation. With our teeth clenched, very grimly and doggedly we climbed and climbed, cutting our boots and blistering our feet, and watching how the shadows roamed like spectres between those gaunt hills, and how the rocks assumed fantastic shapes. All these endless fortresses of black basalt seemed demon-haunted as the darkness fell, and strange echoes of inhuman sound came up from the valleys and the gorges where night birds were chasing their prey. We had reached the snow heights now, and as we walked we took handfuls of the powdery flakes and moistened our lips and our swollen tongues. I was struck

by the magic of the whiteness around us where this pure untrodden snow lay upon the black ridges, giving a strange softness to the boulders so that they seemed like pillows of down upon which it would be good to lay our heads and go to sleep.

That night we fixed up our tent in the snow at the bottom of a deep ravine, where we might get shelter from the wind, and here Agnès and I lay in our sleeping-bags chattering over the experiences of the day and trying to get warmth. I have a vision of Agnès's head sticking out of his sleeping-bag, and of his old black pipe filling the tent with smoke and glowing in the darkness. He could not do without his pipe, and it was a source of immense comfort to him, though I had to suffer for it. His comfort was short-lived, for we spent a miserable night. Rain fell heavily, and soon our tent was full of water, and we lay in cold pools, feeling very wretched and uncomfortable. We were glad when daylight came again and we could push on and get a little warmth by exercise.

But our progress was barred after some time by a huge basalt wall towering above us to an immense height, unassailable and unbroken. We were pigmy men standing below the bastions of a giant's citadel. It frowned down upon us in gloomy majesty and we stared up at its grim face with a sense of awe and impotence. The Zeye glacier had cut its way through this great mountain range, forming one among a long series of immense glaciers, which, as I have proved beyond doubt, belong to a range of snow-clad and ice-bound mountains, hitherto uncharted, extending from Mount Richard to Mount Ross. All this mountain-system is set down on the chart, which I have done my best to correct and complete.

Agnès and I managed to force our way round the hills and searched for some hot springs which had been marked upon our old inaccurate chart; but although we covered the ground in which they were alleged to be, we could find no trace of them, and I do not believe they exist.

Our provisions were now dwindling, and I gave the word to turn back on the homeward trail. Our shoes had been worn to strips on the first day, and we had to take to our sea-boots, which made walking very heavy and slow in this wild and rugged country. The rain had swollen the streams, and when we came back to the spot where we had left our tent in order to push on unhampered, we found it extremely difficult to get across to it. We spent some time in trying to find a ford no higher than our leggings, but at last Agnès, who had become impatient for his food, decided to wade across. He went immediately up to his waist in the ice-cold water, and when I heard him shouting and swearing, as he threw up his arms and ploughed through the stream with stiff legs, I could not help laughing at him until my sides ached. It was really very comical, though painful to poor Agnès! I decided to play a more patient game, and at last I succeeded in finding a part of the stream where the water did not run so deep. When I got

back to the tent I saw Agnès changing his clothes, and again I laughed at him. He looked at me suspiciously, wondering how I had managed to keep so dry.

‘Anyhow,’ he said, ‘I suppose your boots are full of water, Captain?’

‘No, my friend,’ I replied calmly. ‘As you will see, the leather is wet outside, but I have kept dry feet.’

‘Well, I’m blessed!’ he said, and he stared at me as if I were a wonder-worker.

On the way back we found a big salt lake, and out of compliment to my good comrade I called it Agnès Lake. In future years, when other travellers stand upon its banks, I hope they will remember that name and give a thought to the young seaman of the little *J. B. Charcot*, who played the accordion with such a gentle touch, and hunted seals with such berserker fury. I am glad to have immortalised Léon Agnès, good Norman, good seaman, and good fellow.

After having lived on cold victuals with not a drop of hot liquid to warm our bones,



it was splendid when we found some fuel with which we could make a fire. We came to some ledges on which acæna grass was growing, and it was worth more to us than gold. For this grass has long roots which are as good as firewood when dry, and we gathered a bundle of them and made a first-class bonfire on which we boiled a small kettle. Then we made tea and warmed our limbs, and Agnès and I thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, and could not find it in our hearts to envy any man alive. It is astonishing how philosophical one becomes, and how one's heart expands with beneficence towards all mankind when, after a long lack of the simplest luxuries, one is able to enjoy a little creature comfort!

We now got back to the extremity of Irish Bay, where we had left our boat. We loaded it with bundles of roots for making other fires and other feasts, and rowing into the bay again, went through the narrow pass of Husker Strait into Winter Harbour. Here we found ourselves in the happy hunting-ground of the Kerguelen whales. The sea

was crowded with them. Their black snouts and fins made the water black. In every direction we saw them spouting, and wherever we looked there was the sun gleam of light upon a long smooth body, a ripple of waves, and a black monster gliding forward as quietly and swiftly as a torpedo on its way to deadly work. They came within a few yards of our boat, and I had the horrid fear that they might charge into us and capsize us. Agnès and I almost rowed our hearts out to get away from this tremendous crowd of creatures who, with a single blow, would have smashed our small craft into match-sticks. We pulled and pulled until our arms ached, and then ran to the beach of Harbour Island with a feeling of thankfulness at having escaped a very serious peril.

Here, when we went on shore, we made a new and joyful discovery. Indeed, it was the most glorious find we made on Desolation Island, with the exception of the coal in Sandy Cove. My readers must not expect me to record a discovery of gold or precious stones.

Our treasure trove was of base metal, but enormously valuable in our scheme of things. My excited shouts were aroused by the sight of five enormous and magnificent kettles!

They were not kettles for boiling tea or cocoa. They were not really kettles at all in the ordinary sense of the word. They were the cauldrons in which men melt down blubber for seal oil, and they were five times bigger than our own, and therefore at least five times more useful. You may imagine, therefore, the delight with which I discovered them. It was a sight to gladden our eyes. Agnès and I almost danced round them, and told each other a hundred times that it was the best news we could take back with us to Captain Henri and the crew. They had been left by American sailors on this shore in 1850, probably because they had intended to return for further seal hunts, but had been frustrated by the hand of unknown fate—and near by we found other relics.

There was, for example, an old whale-boat which had been supported on a spar placed

across two boulders. The spar had rotted in twain, and the boat had a broken back. All its paint had been washed off and rabbits had eaten into the wood, and it was the weariest, craziest, old skeleton of a derelict that could be seen on any shore. Around the boat was a lot of old iron, among which were two anchors, one of them broken and the other rust-eaten. There were also five or six old casks, all rotten and tumbling to pieces. One of them contained treacle, into which I dipped my finger. But when I tasted it I found it was quite sour. Most of the casks had holes gnawed into them, and had become rabbit hutches for happy families.

Only one cask had remained untouched by wind and weather and small beasts with sharp teeth. I wondered at this, but soon discovered the reason of its escape. It was full of salt, which had preserved the wood and kept off the rabbits, who have no appetite for this article of diet. It was, of course, impossible to carry back even one of the giant blubber kettles. It would have sent us to

the bottom like a stone; so, after lingering around them for some time, we decided to set out again on the homeward journey, in high spirits at the good news we brought with us. We should have to bring the *J. B. Charcot* to Harbour Island to fetch those precious things.

But we did not get back to Gazelle Basin without trouble and peril. One of our north-west gales blew up, fierce and threatening. From the north the wind came thundering down, breaking heavily upon the islands, so that it was impossible for a small boat to live in such high seas. It was lucky for us that we had not put our boat out before the warning came, and there was nothing for it but to settle down as comfortably as we could on shore and wait until fairer weather set in.

For three days, then, we were prisoners on Harbour Island, and our patience was severely tried. But, like true seamen, we made ourselves as comfortable as possible in the position. At night we made a big fire with the old casks near our tent, and I went forth and

shot some penguins and ducks. These we cooked at the fire, comforting ourselves with the delightful smell of the roasting flesh, and enjoying the anticipation almost as much as the realisation of the meal. Indeed, there was but little to do except eating and sleeping, and we had some great feasts. I shall never forget the sight of Agnès squatting on his haunches before that fire which he nursed so tenderly, and picking the bones of a duck with quiet and diligent delight. We had one or two books with us, and these we read in that howling wilderness with studious interest. They were volumes out of my school chest. I remember I had Lafontaine's *Fables*—always delightful, amusing, shrewd, and wise—and Agnès was absorbed in Voltaire's *History of Charles XII. of Sweden*. It excited him tremendously, and it is a proof of Voltaire's immortal genius, and of the intelligent mind of Agnès, that this simple seaman should be so thrilled by this historical study. But, as I have said, Agnès had a good brain, and if he had had his chance of

a superior education, he would have made full use of the privilege.

I think my readers would be amused and interested if they could get a clear mental vision of us at that time—sitting there under the shelter of great rocks, over which the wind came shrieking and howling, close to the storm-tossed sea rolling ceaselessly in fierce breakers upon the jagged and rugged shore, our tent flapping and swaying, our fire smouldering, and ever and anon bursting into long curling tongues of flame, the smell of roast penguin making a sweet incense to our nostrils, and clean-picked bones lying around as the relics of former feasts, and Agnès and I, dirty, dishevelled, hairy, disreputable-looking ruffians, studying the pages of Lafontaine and Voltaire!

Agnès, during our tramp overland and during our nights in camp, had, as I have already remarked, the solace, which I did not share (having no taste that way), of smoking his pipe. Once an awful tragedy threatened to overwhelm him, for in stumbling over the



rocks he lost the bowl of his pipe, and realising his loss some little time afterwards, stood aghast and dismayed. Knowing that no further exploration could be made if Agnès could not smoke—for he was a bond-slave to tobacco—I shared his search for the old black bowl, and, after poking and peering about, was lucky enough to find it. Agnès's gratitude was touching and profound. He thanked me as warmly as if I had saved him from a horrible death. So all was well for a little while. But when we were held prisoners on Harbour Island another misfortune overtook us, for Agnès ran clean out of tobacco. He searched every pocket for any shred of the precious weed, and sucked his empty pipe fiercely and piteously, but it was all of no avail. My comrade was suffering diabolical torments, and his temper was breaking down under the strain. I took pity on him. Bad weather or good weather, we must get back to the *J. B. Charcot* and to the tobacco-jar. As a matter of fact, there was little improvement in the weather, and a tremendous sea was

running. But we put on the life-belts which we usually carried in the boat and launched her on the turbulent waves. It was a reckless adventure, but what of this when a man is craving for a smoke?

We succeeded in rounding the point to make Pigeon Harbour, but this was the worst part of the passage, and there were many times when I believed our last hour had come. We were out in the full blast of the north gale, and our rowing boat was a mere cockle-shell tossed upon the vast billows. We rowed and rowed, more like machines than men, and sometimes we descended into terrible abysses with a mountain of water bearing down upon us as though it would smash us into nothingness, and then by a kind of miracle we were riding upon the high summit of that rolling sea until again we shot down into the chasm below another oncoming precipice.

It needed all our strength and all our skill to keep the nose of the boat forward to those stupendous seas. If they had caught us broadside on we should have been cracked like

a nutshell. Fortunately Agnès was an expert boatman, and he had immense strength and a courage that never faltered. And yet, as the hours passed and we were still rowing for our lives, it seemed that our strength could hold out no more. We were just puny straws before the mighty force of irresistible Nature.

Once or twice in every minute I looked at Agnès to see if he were weakening. But with his teeth clenched and a grim look upon his face, he bent to his oars, and his stroke was always steady and strong. Now and again, when we rose high in that long see-saw, we caught a swift glimpse of the rugged shore with the white sea-foam, like smoke about its rocks, and this gave us new courage, for we knew that if we had great luck we should get into the shelter of Gazelle Basin where the *J.B. Charcot* lay at anchor. This luck was ours, and after five hours in the open sea, battling all the time with its fury, we were hailed by our friends, who were ready to drag us ashore.

They had seen us for a long time. Filled with the deepest anxiety, and almost breathless with suspense, they had watched us appear for a moment on a high peak of water and then dip down into the great caverns, and then rise again, just like a bobbing cork in the monstrous waves, but always drawing a little nearer as each mountain tumbled upon us and upheaved us and swept us forward. My brother gripped my hand when at last I sprang out of the boat and staggered up the beach in a dazed and drunken way.

And then Agnès turned round to his comrades very calmly and said, 'I'll thank you for a plug of tobacco, friends.'

## CHAPTER VII

HENRI, my brother, was enchanted to hear of our discovery of the great blubber kettle on Harbour Island.

‘That is excellent news,’ he said, and straightway we decided to take our small ship out of Gazelle Basin, where she had lain so snugly, to fetch those valuable pots. We were wise enough, however, to wait until the gale was spent. Even then we started too soon—for in Kerguelen one gale is quickly followed by another—and as I have to tell you, we had the nearest squeak in seagoing destruction. The capture of the blubber kettles nearly cost us our ship and our lives, and, when I remember the adventure that befell us, I marvel that I am now writing the account of it.

It was ten days after my return with Agnès that we heaved up the anchor, put

up our canvas, and, leaving Gazelle Basin, stood out to the open sea. No sooner had we got as far, and it was not very far, than we faced a nasty wind and an ugly sea. From the north came one of those abominable gales which howl almost unceasingly upon the Island of Desolation and we had to beat up against it, painfully and arduously, with the little *Charcot* lurching and staggering like a poor wounded' beast, and with the infernal wind buffeting her with brutal blows. It was mad to force our brave boat into the jaws of such a devouring gale, and, reluctantly enough, we ran for Pigeon Harbour and cowered there for two days until our patience was quite spent. Agnès had risked his life and mine for a pipe of tobacco; Henri and I were just as ready to run risks for those precious kettles. So we made a second attempt to get to Harbour Island and again slipped out to sea. But the wind was as bad as ever, and the waters were in convulsions. Every gust, tearing at us with the force of a thunderbolt, threatened to snap our masts

into splinters and tear our canvas to ribbons. Frenchmen as we were, impatient of the word 'Retreat' and without the slow enduring patience of the Saxon race, we cursed the gale, and surrendered to the inevitable. We swung round and raced for Sandy Cove, where we had found the safest shelter before. We reached this harbour and ran home and lowered our anchors. Here was safety anyhow, we thought, and tried to forget the kettles for a little while. But we did not count upon the malign vengeance of that wind from whose clutches we had slipped away. It would not be balked. Suddenly that roaring north gale banged round the compass to the south-west. The little *Charcot* was caught between two running seas and captured by the new wind, and though she resisted gallantly, both anchors dragged and we swung astern on to the rocks.

Our feelings may be imagined but not described. After all our adventures, our long voyaging, our careful vigilance, here was our brave ship stuck upon a rocky ledge in the



shelter of a cove which we had learnt to call 'home.' Having escaped from the north gale, we had been fairly caught by the south-wester, and there seemed to be the most deadly likelihood of losing our ship for ever. If the wind blew hard from the same quarter we should be fastened more securely upon those rocks, and slowly but surely the *J. B. Charcot* would be battered and broken before our eyes.

Henri and I were terribly alarmed, though outwardly calm and confident. We had to set an example to our men, and keep our heads well screwed on, but our hearts sank very low. The first thing to do was to make all arrangements for a long shore life in the event of losing the ship. I therefore called for the 'shipwreck bag,' and all of us were hard at work hauling up provisions and stores. Then Henri ordered a boat to be lowered so that we might take a rope ashore and convey the goods to land. It was difficult and dangerous work. The south-west gale beat the boat back several times, and the tide ran very strong. There was more than a

chance of losing a life or two in addition to the loss of the ship. But eventually we succeeded in running the boat aground, tied the rope fast to a rock, and landed sail-cloth for tents, biscuits, tinned meats, tools, matches, guns, spirit cans and spirit-lamp, the sextant, nails and other stores which would enable us to live until rescue came.

Meanwhile the tide was running out, and the lower it got the higher rose the stern of the *J. B. Charcot* on that infernal rock until the deck was at an awful slant, and the bows were pitched down as though the ship were about to burrow its way into the sea floor.

Henri and I knew that the greatest danger would come when the tide rose again. Then we should see whether we were to lose or save our ship. When that spring tide rose it would bring with it a force that would either float us off or break us on the rock. No one could say beforehand which of these two things would happen. We could only wait—with sickening anxiety, and the torture of hope and fear fighting a duel in our hearts.

Yet so strong is habit, and so good is discipline, we sat down to our evening meal in the cabin as though nothing were amiss. Esnault had cooked the dinner as usual though the galley was at a queer angle, and the cabin was pitched up at one end so that we had to cling to our plates to prevent them from slipping off the table. Few of us had any appetite. Sadness is a bad sauce—and we were very sad at the thought that this might be the last meal on the *J. B. Charcot*. Only Larose was quite calm. To me his calmness, sublime and unassailable, was at that hour irritating and exasperating. I wanted to hit him, to shake him out of that fat and comfortable tranquillity, to make him shout and get excited. Yet when I look back upon that meal I am filled with admiration for the simple stolidity of that young seaman. His appetite did not suffer. He ate with the steady voracity which never (but once) failed him during our voyage and wanderings. I do not think that Larose had less heart than any of us. But his hunger

had to be satisfied, you understand. He was like the immortal Porthos in *The Three Musketeers*.

Finally the tide rose with the darkness, and as it crept inch by inch up to the rock on which our stern was stuck, I was in a fever of apprehension varied with a torturing hope. Gradually the bows lifted, the slant of the deck became less acute, the cabin shifted back in more horizontal lines, and our hope became more settled in our hearts. The wind had abated, the sea was more tranquil, the *J. B. Charcot* was now like a ship at anchor. Suddenly her stern gave a great knock, and all her timbers trembled with the shock, and our hearts leapt into our mouths. The blow was repeated, and then once again, and each time it seemed to us that the bottom of our boat was being staved in. But after the third knock there was a scraping tearing noise which made our blood run cold and then—we breathed with thankfulness. Our ship was afloat! She had slipped off the rock and was in her full depth of water, as a ship should

be. I think Henri and I were very grateful to Providence, which had been so kind to us. I think I came very near to tears—of sheer joy. We were like children for a little while. To us the *J. B. Charcot* was a living thing. We knew the spirit of her. We loved her gallantry. Her loss would have been more than the destruction of senseless timbers. We should have mourned the death of a good friend. We therefore rejoiced exceedingly and laughed with gladness when we found her floating again. She had not even sprung a leak. Her sturdy timbers were sound and whole.

All that night we worked hard to get her to safer anchorage. With a flare on board casting a weird and flickering light upon the dark cliffs and the ink-black waters, we worked with winch and cable to haul her further into shelter, and at last cast anchor in good ground where she held fast. We had no sleep, and were very tired, but when the morning came we were very happy, for there was no need of the shipwreck bag on shore,

and we gaily brought it back to the ship with the other stores.

But still all the while those blubber kettles were waiting for us in Harbour Island, and we wanted them badly! So after two or three days we left again, and this time, without serious trouble, sailed through Tang Pass and lay close off Harbour Island. We got our kettles at last, or at least two of them. It was not an easy job to bring them on board, but we put them afloat and towed them in a rowing boat to the side of the *J. B. Charcot*, and then lowered tackle and hauled them on deck. They were a most valuable addition to our sealing equipment and worth all the trouble we had taken to secure them.

Now another strong gale came on. My readers will get tired of those gales, but not so tired as we were. You see, round the Island of Desolation they were almost without cessation, and our life was always disturbed by the danger of them. It was then about the 1st or 2nd of July and mid-winter at

Kerguelen, and that month and the next were the worst we had. Hardly a day of fine weather came to give us a little comfort. We worked, and ate, and slept, and watched, with the wind howling round us, with seas running high, with sudden squalls shrieking at us, with no peace when we might relax our vigilance. And when we were off Harbour Island the gale blew with a strength strange even to Kerguelen, so that we had to cling to masts and ropes to save ourselves from riding on the wind, and even heavy things like ship's buckets were blown away as if they had been mere strips of paper. I never saw anything like the force of it. It seemed to rattle the very bones in our bodies, and it swept through the rigging with tearing, yelling rage. We had to put double lashings on our furled sails to save them from being torn into strips, and everything on deck, including our rowing boats, had to be fastened down with stronger ropes. Our anchor chains were strained so taut that we expected them to break at any moment, but fortunately we had



found a good bottom of sticky mud so that the anchors could not drag.

We left Harbour Island on 8th July for Gazelle Basin, and had a good strong carrying wind at the start. But on 9th July it shifted and we had our first gale from the east. Then it dropped to south-east and stayed there, and this brought a heavy snow-storm—the worst we saw at Kerguelen. It snowed as though the heavens were falling upon us in thick white flakes. It buried our ship with a pure white cargo, soft as down upon the deck and spars, and anchor chains and wheel, and compass-box and rigging, so that our ship was transformed into a snow-bird. Kerguelen was no longer the Island of Desolation, black and grim. It was an Island of White Enchantment. Every high mountain range, every peak and precipice and terrace and ledge, was covered with this cloak of ermine. For miles one could see the snow-capped hills losing their accustomed outlines under the burden of those heavy falling flakes. The valleys were six feet deep in snow, which remained

there for three weeks. Beautiful as the scenery was in this white disguise, the weather was very unpleasant and disagreeable to us and seriously interrupted our work in Gazelle Basin, to which we had now returned. There would be a heavy snow squall every ten minutes with brief intervals of bright sunshine, during which the country sparkled and glittered with an almost blinding radiance until it became overcast again and a new squall obscured the view.

At this point it will be well for me to give my readers a more accurate and detailed knowledge of our daily life during these winter months. Apart from working the coal, we took things a little easily. I knew that when the summer came we should have a time of hard fatiguing toil devoted to seal-hunting and blubber boiling, and therefore I wanted my men to have as much rest as possible while there was an opportunity.

Sometimes we were as long as five days on board without going ashore, lest a gale might spring up and we could not return. It was

rather tedious at times, but we were fairly snug, and kept cheerful. Although we were at anchor we always kept the night and day watches, which were changed every three hours. Then those of us who had tucked into our berths would awake at eight o'clock, which was the hour of dawn. I needed no alarm clock. Larose's 'biscuit mill' always aroused me and, having lain for a few minutes listening to those grinding teeth at work on hard ship's biscuits, I would turn out for my coffee, which had been prepared at that time by Esnault. During the night watch the man on duty was privileged to sit in the cook's galley reading and smoking by the light of an oil-lamp, so that he did not suffer great hardships even during the snow squalls, though it was fairly cold. After breakfast the men always went to haul in the fishing-net which had been put in over night, and generally we caught enough to serve us for one day's meals. The fish were then handed over to the cook, who prepared them very skillfully, and at 10.30 we sat down to luncheon.

It was not a bad menu. We used to have our fresh-caught fish with macaroni, peas, or rice, followed by a dish of mussels which we found in large quantities on the rocks. This was washed down with drinking water (for we had got past our daily allowance of wine), and afterwards we would linger over tea and coffee, while those who liked smoking had a quiet pipe.

After this *déjeuner* or luncheon we used to do the real hard work of the day so long as there was light. Our little procession would tramp down to Sandy Cove, three-quarters of an hour's walk away, with picks and shovels, shoulder high, and there we would toil like navvies under the ledge of rock getting out the coal. At first this was easy, for we had only to pick out the loose lumps and send them hurtling down. But after a while we came to the solid face of the seam, and then it was necessary to do blasting work. We would make a hole in the seam, thrust in a dynamite cartridge, light the fuse, and rush away to a little distance. In a few moments

there would be a tremendous explosion and down would come tumbling the black boulders. It was, as I have said, a very fair quality of coal in Sandy Cove. But the grain of the wood was still visible in it, and sometimes it contained traces of amber. As soon as the light waned and darkness approached, we used to seize upon the biggest lumps we could carry and, hoisting them on to our shoulders, would tramp back that three-quarters of a mile and cast our burden into a heap on the beach. Day after day we used to fulfil this duty until at last our constant coming and going wore a pathway from the beach to the coal-hole, which could be seen clearly from a distance.

At these times we always carried a gun with us and were almost sure of bringing aboard a rabbit or two, or a couple of wild-fowl, as a contribution to the larder. It was dark at 5 o'clock, and at 6 o'clock we were all very glad to sit down to the dinner cooked by Esnault, who improved with experience. This was a more elaborate affair

naturally than our *déjeuner*, and may be set out in the following menu:—

Soup (from tins):

Fish:

Tinned meat:

Rabbit or Duck:

Vegetables (from tins):

Kerguelen Cabbage:

Coffee.

Not a bad meal, my readers will say. Yet I confess that I became very tired of this fare. It had a somewhat sickening monotony, and the tinned things especially had no charm for us. Nevertheless we had no right to complain for there was always plenty to eat, and we might consider ourselves as the pampered sons of fortune.

After dinner the crew would go to the small hole forward and spend the time smoking and singing to the accordion played by Agnès, which was a continual source of pleasure to them. In the cabin Henri and I used to talk of Paris and family affairs, and of books we had read long ago and now

remembered, discussing their plots and characters and ideas. To listen to our conversation no one would have suspected that we were on a desert island with France on the other side of the world. We often used to talk, also, of our boyhood. After we had gone to sea we had been separated for some years, but now that we had come together again we ransacked our memories for the experiences of our early days, and had many a hearty laugh over old adventures and mischiefs, into which we had plunged as boys together. Then I used to get out my Kipling in the French translation, and get absorbed in *Kim* or the *Jungle Book*, or Henri would read to me, translating as he went along, out of the German book and papers discovered in the abandoned house on Observatory Bay.

I was also busy making observations and writing up my log. Every four hours during the day and night one should make notes of the direction and strength of the wind, and the character of the clouds, and the humidity of the atmosphere, and put on record the



readings of the barometer and thermometer. I hope to publish all these notes in a more scientific story of my expedition which I shall write in French. During the daytime also I interested myself in making a collection of geological specimens and of shellfish, sea-worms, and other small creatures which I preserved in alcohol. These are now being classified and examined by French scientists. I also made a careful plan of Gazelle Basin and the surrounding mountains, and took the soundings of Kirk Harbour. So that, as you see, I did not lead a lazy life.

By this time the captain and crew of the *J. B. Charcot* had an appearance which would have shocked our best friends. Our hair had grown long, our clothes had worn to rags: at least we had to darn and stitch and mend, and ransack our wardrobes for oddments. I wore some thick woollen vests which I had brought from the South Antarctic Expedition with Dr. Charcot, and I had also the naval uniform which I used to wear when I was serving as a naval recruit (according to our

conscript system) on board a French battleship. It was a curious place in which to don this uniform, but *necessitas non habet leges*. My brother and the men let their hair and beards grow long, and Agnès was more like a Viking than ever with his fine blonde beard, but I used to cut the hair close on my face with clippers, as I always felt uncomfortable if it grew to any length. I suppose we looked as dirty a set of tramps as could be found in the wide world. Yet we had traditions of cleanliness and tidiness, and Sunday was our washing day, when we went through an almost religious ceremony of boiling our undergarments in a big kettle. The men, too, were handy with needle and thread, and in their spare time used to sit on deck sewing up the holes and rents in their trousers and jackets.

I must not forget to say that on the 14th of July we celebrated the feast-day of the Republic in good style. We cracked our last bottle of Madeira which we had kept for that occasion, and, raising our glasses, honoured the toast of '*Vive la France!*' My brother had

cooked a special dinner, and we had dessert of dried plums and jam, followed by a glass of rum. We thought and spoke of 'the old folks at home' in our dear native land, and our love went across the wide waters to France.

It was about this time that Larose had a serious loss. Having lost that he had lost everything—for it was his appetite. It was all due to a dish of mussels. Larose liked mussels prodigiously, and as they were plentiful and Esnault cooked a vast quantity, he had no need to be sparing of them. He was not. He ate heartily and beyond the bounds of what, to him, was moderation. I noticed nothing unusual. By this time I was accustomed to the appetite of this fine fellow. But on the following morning I was surprised that he did not get up, and, going to his bunk, found poor Larose in great suffering. There were dark rings round his eyes; he was feverish, and kept tossing from one side to the other, so that I could see he was very ill. I dosed him with medicine, but I am sorry to say that, having failed to diagnose his complaint cor-

rectly, it made him worse. It was my brother who enlightened me. 'Why, it must be those mussels!' he said, when I went to him for a consultation, and then he told me that he had sat and watched Larose eating them, with a kind of horrible fascination. Esnault had wanted to remove the dish at the end of dinner, but Larose said: 'Hi, there, leave it for a bit. They are too good to go begging,' and there and then he made short work of mussels enough for all the rest of us, if we had just sat down to dinner! He paid a heavy penalty for this enjoyment. He was violently sick, and for several days was very peaky over his meals. It was a miserable condition for a lad to whom meal-time was the most important hour of the day. However, he recovered slowly, and not long afterwards I was surprised to see him eating mussels again.

What gave me more concern was that at this time Henri began to get seriously unwell. It was not due to those confounded mussels, but he had a touch of gastritis, caused, I think,

by living continually on tinned foods, and it made him look very haggard. He tried to hide his illness from me, but I knew that he lay awake at night and could get no rest. His nerves also became highly strung, for the only thing that seemed to brace him up a little was coffee, which he took at all times of the day and night. This of course was bad for him, and for the first time since my arrival in Kerguelen I became low-spirited, and had gloomy thoughts.

Nevertheless work had to be done, and when September came Agnès and I started on a long boat trip to explore the coast-line on the north-eastern side of Gazelle Basin and the great mountains of the interior. We stopped first in Kirk Harbour, as there was too much sea and a heavy rain-storm. As this promised to last some time, we beached our boat and walked back to Gazelle Basin across the cliffs, but when fair weather set in we returned and found our boat quite safe. We then worked round to Elizabeth Harbour, and on the night of the 16th of September put up

our tent at the bottom of this little bay. We could not sleep a wink during the night, for we were surrounded by a large herd of seals that had just returned to Kerguelen after the winter. They made a fearful noise around us, roaring in their deep, gruff, reverberating voices, like lions and tigers in a tropical jungle, and they came so close to us that Agnès became scared.

‘Captain,’ he said, ‘if one of those big seals rolls into this tent we shall be squashed!’

It was not an agreeable prospect certainly, and many times during the night one or other of us went out of the tent to throw stones at those monsters lying about like big black boulders in the darkness.

The next day, not having been ‘squashed,’ we went farther along the coast and found a number of penguin, petrel, and other eggs. They were the first we had found in the Island of Desolation. We explored the coast-line from Elizabeth Harbour to Vulcan Cove and found it very dangerous, for the sea was strewn with rocks and uncharted islands. Indeed



our old chart was useless at this part of Kerguelen, for even Elizabeth Point was marked a mile too far to the north.

We now left our boat and went afoot down a deep gorge through the mountains. It was a marvellous walk of twelve miles along a series of valleys full of freshwater lakes, with the mountains rising straight and steep and grim and black on either side of us. Agnès and I were walking on a ledge of rock along these valleys with the gorge below us and the basalt walls rising sheer above us. It seemed to me like a walk through Dante's *Inferno*, and I remember Gustav Doré's famous pictures of the mountains of Hell. But there were no devils to trouble us, and down below in the valley moss and grass grew with some luxuriance, and the sky high over the prison walls was reflected in the freshwater pools. We came through the Studer Valley, named by a German party of explorers, which is a long straight gorge driven like a funnel through the mountains, and seen by us very clearly when the *J. B. Charcot*



had sailed down Hillsborough Bay. It forms quite a good road, with easy travelling.

After this tramp we went back to Elizabeth Harbour. I wanted very much to explore the northern bays, but we were overtaken again by dirty weather, and though we tried to get out in our rowing boat, we were beaten back to harbour again. We spent two days watching the seals for the lack of better occupation, and Agnès and I acquired a great deal of new knowledge about those creatures. As many of my readers have not been so far as Kerguelen or other haunts of the seal, it may be of interest to them if I describe their habits more closely than I have yet done in this story.

After the winter months, the full-grown males came first to shore in the last days of August. They were very big, being more than twenty feet long. In the water their trunks were hidden, but when they scrambled upon the rocks, and especially when they were angry, they elevated their short trunks, by which they get their name of sea-elephants,

and gave vent to deep roars. About 15th September the females followed their lords and masters, and as soon as they were on shore they gave birth to their young. We saw some of the little seals born, and the mothers seemed to suffer a good deal, crying and groaning in a strangely human way. At these times the females seemed eager to go out to sea again, but the old bulls kept watchful eyes on them and would hustle after them, round them off from the rocky ledge, and push them back on to the shore. The females were only about one-third of the length of the males, and each male had about twelve as his wives. But they did not keep them undisputed and unchallenged. Through the sea came a throng of bull-elephants eager to fight for the possession of the females. The old fellows, as soon as they saw these enemies approaching, rushed at a great pace to the water's edge to give instant battle to them. Then a fierce and bloody fight would take place, thrilling and fearful to any human being who might be watching. One of the new-

comers would roll his eyes upon a gaudy beauty on the shore and attempt to get towards her. But he could only do so past the bleeding and wounded body of an old warrior who was already the hero of a hundred fights. I saw one such duel which lives in my memory. The bull-elephant who had been first in possession raised himself on the fore part of his body with his hind-quarters right off the ground, and with his great jaws gaping and uttering deep trumpet blasts he awaited the coming of his foe. He found one worthy of his strength, a male as big as himself, as fierce as himself, as strong as himself. They fought for twenty minutes head to head, jaws to jaws, charging each other like battering rams, shoving and pushing with monstrous force, biting and gnawing at each other with appalling ferocity. They made for each other's neck and scrunched their jaws into the flesh of it, until shaken off and hurled backwards by the other beast. The neck of each sea-elephant was covered with long deep cuts. Their blood poured down and made

ruddy pools among the rocks in which they wallowed and struggled, still biting fiercely and shooting out their necks with that quick, sudden, powerful jerk of which I had learnt to beware in my own combats with them. There was something grotesquely terrible and soul-affrighting in this combat between those two titanic warriors. Yet my eyes were spell-bound by the haunting interest of it. At last the male who had been first on shore weakened. His gross body was panting and gasping. The blood was streaming from a score of wounds, one eye had been torn from its socket, and his force was spent. Suddenly he gave up the fight, and with a despairing roar he plunged across the rocky ledge and disappeared into the sea. The victor came leisurely to the camp of the vanquished and, careless of his own wounds, which had made him a mass of gory flesh, careless also of the females who were now his by right of conquest, lay down in the centre of them and slept.

These war heroes do not pay the slightest attention to their wounds, which heal so

quickly that in two or three days they are cured. But to the end of their long lives they bear the scars of these great fights, and out of the water I have seen old sea-dogs climb with torn hides and eyeless sockets and missing or half-gnawed flippers as records of the titanic warfare they have waged upon their rivals and enemies. And always, when I have seen them, there has come to my mind Rudyard Kipling's story of *The White Seal*, and his description of those great beasts who fought in the breakers, and fought in the sand, and fought on the smooth-worn basalt rocks of the nurseries. A hundred times I thought, I saw Sea Catch—a huge grey seal with almost a mane on his shoulders and long wicked dog-teeth. When he heaved himself up on his front flippers he stood more than four feet clear of the ground, and his weight, if any one had been bold enough to weigh him, was nearly seven hundred pounds. He was scarred all over with the marks of savage fights, but he was always ready for just one fight more. He would put his head on one side, as though

he were afraid to look his enemy in the face, then he would shoot it out like lightning, and when the big teeth were firmly fixed on the other seal's neck, the other seal might get away if he could, but Sea Catch would not help him.

I remember now that Sea Catch was a fur seal and not a sea-elephant like those round Kerguelen, but Kipling's description will stand for the Berserker of those tribes that fought upon the rocks at Elizabeth Harbour. These big brutes are not afraid of attacking man, and I have already described one great fight we had with them. We had others later in our history, and I will give praise to the enduring courage of the warriors. Really they were no match for us. Our agility was more effective than their strength; one gun with its narrow tube was more a master of death than their monstrous violence. But it was dangerous when we were hemmed in by the herd. They would come straight for us, and when we were tackling one great roaring fellow, the others would come ever so quietly and steadily behind over the smooth rock



with their noiseless bodies and try to catch us in their jaws with that lightning thrust of the head. We had to 'look slippy,' as English sailors say. And never once would the bull seals turn back while their females were with them. 'Face to the foe in victory or defeat' is the watchword of the fighting seal. When they were wounded it only angered them the more, and did not make them faint-hearted or ready to yield. They only yielded to Death, and they died fighting and roaring. But men are tricky fellows, and we dwarfs learnt to kill the giants. We even learnt to frighten them—a thing that seemed much more difficult when we first attacked them with loaded clubs, which did not scare them at all but only made them fierce. It is curious that if we threw small pebbles at them they would waddle away, and that is how we kept them at a distance when we did not crave for their society. The females' eyes would flash with a yellow fire when we played that trick upon them, and I did not like the ugly look of those eyes.



When undisturbed, the seals lay around on the rocks in families, each male surrounded by his dozen wives, like an old Turk, and keeping watchful, jealous eyes upon the other bulls. For hours they would rest lazily, sleeping and dozing in luxurious ease. And with monstrous comicality they would scratch themselves with their flippers, rolling over a little to get at some ticklish spot or curling their tails up. However awkward they were on shore, they were magnificent in their strength and grace in the water, swimming with the force and directness of a torpedo, and careless of breakers that would smash a boat to pieces. It was a great and glorious thing to watch one of those huge breakers rolling in, and to see the seals facing them unmoved with dauntless strength and courage, not shifted out of their position by the full force of the hurtling sea.

But the little ones were the jolliest things to watch, so mirthful and full of pranks and the sheer joy of life. When they are born, one baby to each mother, they are only three

feet long, and they are covered with very smooth and very long black hair. After three weeks this falls off and a greyish or yellow hair, very close cropped, is left on their plump little bodies. As soon as they are suckled, the youngsters leave their parents and go off all together. They have the best of fun learning to swim in the shallow streams where all day long they play, frisking and barking like young dogs, so that the noise of a seal nursery may be heard for miles. They roll each other over and play all kinds of pranks in the water and on the shore, scuffling, crawling, leaping, darting all together, until they get tired and go to sleep on the black sand under the basalt rocks, to wake again in a little while and begin the game again. The old men seals and the old women seals take no notice of these brawling youngsters, and soon they learn to fight like the old warriors, to catch fish while they shoot below the sea, to escape the killer whales, and to capture their sweethearts by those deadly combats on the rocks. Agnès and I,

lying by our tent in Elizabeth Harbour, watched the mothers with their little ones, who were still too young to go to the playground, and Kipling's lullaby came singing through my mind—

'You mustn't swim till you're six weeks old  
Or your head will be sunk by your heels,  
And summer gales and killer whales  
Are bad for baby seals.

'Are bad for baby seals, dear rat,  
As bad as bad can be,  
But splash and grow strong,  
And you can't be wrong,  
Child of the open sea!'

After six days at Elizabeth Harbour, when we had ample opportunity of studying these little ways of the sea-elephants and their babies, my comrade and I took to the boat again and fought our way back to the *J. B. Charcot*. It is almost needless to say that we had another gale, and once more we put on our life-belts and rowed until our arms ached and our hands were blistered, over the surging sea, which tried to drag us down into its depths and to swamp us with its crested waves, and to bash

us to bits with its blows and buffets. But we escaped all this ferocity, and sprang ashore once more in Gazelle Basin.

On board the little ship we found my brother and his comrades making preparations to leave the harbour in which, on the whole, we had found safe shelter. We set up a flag-mast on shore and a bottle containing a message to any ship that might come that way, telling the programme of our future, and saying that we proposed to go to Observatory Bay for a few months.

So we sailed out of Gazelle Basin on the 15th of October 1908, in search of new scenes and new adventures.

## CHAPTER VIII

I AM sure my readers, who by this time have become accustomed to Kerguelen weather, will be surprised if I do not immediately record another gale. Have no fear! The gale was not long in coming, though at the start of our trip to another part of the wild coast-line we lay becalmed near Bulforde Rock. In spite of the wind having dropped, the sea was very rough, and we were afraid of drifting on to the rocks. We knew those Kerguelen calms, and when we read the barometer we waited for the inevitable north gale.

It came in a few hours with all its old bluster and boisterousness. Sailing under a small sheet we drifted steadily for shore, and the lookout man kept shouting this abominable intelligence. Then the wind played its usual game of blind-man's buff and jumped to

the south-west with a romp and a roar, churning up the sea and catching us between the two rolling tides, so that our ship was hurled this way and that in a giddy, crazy, staggering dance. It was simply diabolical, and the only thing we could do was to pour oil on the sea to soften its wrath. I believe landsmen regard this oiling of the waters as a myth invented by writers of fiction. Let me assure them that it is really done in time of stress, and that more than once we owed our escape from an ugly sea to this quaint and primitive custom.

Fortunately the change of wind enabled us to stand out from the shore, and when the gale had spent its strength we were out of sight of land. For two days more we beat up and down until we saw land again, and finally we anchored at Grave Island after six days at sea, during which we had gone no further than what would be one day's sail in fair weather.

We found anchorage here, and I went ashore on Grave Island and found the relics

of the dead, which had given the mournful name to this lonely place. There were about thirty graves, and buried there were the bones of American whalers who had made this small island their headquarters, and who by accident and disease had ended their life of adventure and of the liberty of the sea and found their last anchorage upon these rocks. It was strange to stand among these graves and to think of the rough hardy men who, half a century ago, had stood here from time to time between the whale-hunting to lower one of their comrades and to cover his stark body with a little earth and a few boulders. Strange! These men who would have been called wild men in any civilised society, who lived for years together on their ships or in the world's most lonely places, who were under no law save their own self-discipline, whose language no doubt was coarse and sometimes brutal, whose way of life was hard, savage, and as elemental as that of the Scandinavian sea-lovers when history first began, had been touched with sentiment and with



religious faith when they put the poor dead clay of their comrades into these quiet graves. They had carved crosses to put above the graves, and on the beams they had cut Christian texts of pious resignation and hope. I could still read some of the dates and names and texts, though many of the crosses had fallen face downwards, gnawed through at the base by rabbits. The oldest date I found was 1832 and the newest was 1875. Some of the crosses were well carved and decorated with anchors, cut out of copper and wood, nailed on.

‘Rest in peace’; ‘Be ye also ready’; ‘We fade as the leaves’—these were some of the words I deciphered as I stood on this little desert island among the graves. There was one small grave of a boy of ten years of age, a poor little cabin-boy who had been brought all this wild way and then had died. What strange lives and strange adventures had ended on this rock amidst the eternal turbulence of the sea! I went away from Grave Island rather pensively, and with serious thoughts.

I passed over to Hog Island, and here were

relics of other whaling and sealing adventurers. I found the ruined remains of a hut, three or four big kettles, a brick furnace, and lots of spars. In the ruined hut I found a forge and anvil, pieces of chain, and an old capstan, used no doubt to drag dead whales ashore. Probably these things had been handled on many a day in fair weather and foul by the men who now lay quiet in those graves I had seen. To me, a seaman and an explorer and a sealer, each link in those broken chains, each rotten spar, the rusty anvil, and the odds and ends of rubbish, were eloquent of a life such as my comrades and I were now leading. They spoke to me of hard toil, of anxious hopes, of the rough free days, and across the bridge of time I met the spirits of those old whalers who had now sailed into other waters in which they lay to for eternity.

After we had snuggled under the cliffs of Grave Island for two or three days, we went round to Observatory Bay. We reached this on the night of 15th October, having passed a huge uncharted rock in the 'fairway' which

lay in wait for any unwary ship which trusted with too much faith to previous soundings.

At Observatory Bay we were rich in coal, for the Germans had left a store round the hut in which I had spent my eight lonely days putting the house in order, and where the white face at the window had scared me so horribly. Here we pitched our camp and built up the shed and furnace which we dignified by the name of 'factory.' It was a primitive structure, but it took us days of hard work and we were proud of it. When it was finished and ready for blubber-melting we hoisted the French flag over it, and I can give you no idea of the pleasure and pride with which our eyes gazed upon the blue, red and white of our national emblem, which flapped above our heads in the gusty wind. That flag stood for France and all the traditions and glory of France, and all the sentiment of race and faith which inspires the hearts of Frenchmen. We felt more at home, less isolated from the world, when that brave flag was mast-high.

Unfortunately it was a bad place for seals, though a good place for boiling their blubber. There were very few to be seen around, and we knew that we should have to go hunting in other waters. But meanwhile I toiled very hard in the German house, which I used as a workshop, and I had a perfect orgy of cask-making. I enjoyed myself in a quiet, industrious way. With my staves and hoops spread around me, I was like some demon carpenter rapping and tapping in that lonely hut where the mice still played, watching me from their holes with blinking eyes. I made no less than sixty casks here, and, I tell you frankly, they looked very fine when they were all set out in a row! It would take a good deal of oil to fill them, a good many seals to provide the blubber, a lot of smoke and fire to make the oil, and tremendous hunting campaigns to capture the seals. But when all was done, and those casks were filled, we should have a fine cargo in the hold of the *J. B. Charcot*.

This brought us to the last fortnight in

October, and it was splendid weather. I hope my readers will be amazed when I tell them that we had eight fine days without one gale. I think this must have been a record for the Island of Desolation.

On 2nd October I left on a boat trip with Agnès. We rounded Molloy Point and pitched our tent on this part of the coast, not without danger and difficulty. We had a very rough landing, through the heavy swell rolling into Royal Sound and breaking upon the boulder-strewn beach. But Agnès and I were getting very expert in the handling of our boat, and by good luck we managed to ride on one of the rollers to the beach, and then, springing out, dragged it ashore.

We dumped down our stores on the rocks and surveyed our surroundings. A high range of cliffs bristled with jagged peaks above us, like iron battlements and bastions of a vast fortress guarding the coast-line. But away to the east of us the ground was flat, and we could see right across the land, north-eastward, to where the sea broke upon the rounded headland.

Due north from where we lay was the vast range of that high confused mass of mountains, pierced by the gorge through which Agnès and I had walked from Elizabeth Harbour some months before, and crowned by the Chimney-Top Peak, and Mount Crozier and Castle Mount, grim and awful, like Dante's dream of the mountains of Hell.

An amusing incident occurred soon after we were safe ashore. Our bags lay rolled up together on the rocks, and straight towards them came a big male sea-elephant with his huge carcass moving swiftly over the ground. For some reason which I cannot explain—unless he took our stores for a sleeping seal or some beast with whom he could engage in deadly combat—the old fellow was evidently aroused to curiosity and anger. I wanted very much to see what he would do, but Agnès, seized with a sudden fear that our provisions would be swallowed at one gulp in the gaping jaws of the elephant, began to shout wildly and hurled stones at him, so that he retired.



I knew that we were near the spot which the Americans had used as their headquarters in the expedition of 1874 to observe the famous transit of Venus, and I now set off to find any relics of them that had been left. We soon discovered a number of barrels of cement, or rather we found the cement hard and solid as rock, from which the staves had rotted away. There was also a stove with rabbits living in the oven. I could not help smiling at that sight. So little accustomed were the rabbits to the ways of man that they had actually made a home in an oven, in which no doubt many of their respected ancestors had been roasted. Among other odds and ends found here was a tripod that had been used for a telescope.

The next morning, although it was rather rough, we started before sunrise on foot for Prince of Wales Foreland by an unmapped route. The sun rose soon afterwards, and a scene of beauty and splendour surrounded us. The golden arrows of the sun shot upon distant peaks which broke them into dazzling



points of light; the basalt cliffs sparkled with ten thousand facets of polished stone; the snow-capped summits of the high mountains were like fleecy clouds in the blue sky, and the waters of the sea were dancing in the sunlight. It was a morning and a scene which made the heart of man leap with the sheer joy of life, and yet neither Agnès nor I was very joyous. I had never been quite careless and high-spirited since Henri had become unwell, and the thought of his drawn and haggard face, of his sleepless nights, and of his loss of flesh and strength, made me very worried and anxious. Agnès was a sad and serious man for quite another reason. A day or two ago the crew of the *J. B. Charcot* had run out of tobacco, and it was a tragedy to them. Agnès bore his loss like a stoic, but I knew he was suffering severely with a craving which he could not satisfy. As for Jean Bontemps, our boatswain, he was becoming a dazed and broken man. It was real torture to him. He cut out the pockets of his clothes, which had become impregnated with tobacco, and

chewed them until they were tasteless. He even broke up the bowl of a clay pipe and chewed those pieces until they also were of no use to him. Then he brooded and drooped and lost some of his old grip upon the plain duties of life, and sank into a bewildered muddle-headed state of mind. If Henri told him to do such and such a thing he would say, 'Yes, Captain,' and an hour later, perhaps, my brother would find him doing something quite different, and often something quite unnecessary, painfully and laboriously. I had never quite realised before what slaves men become to this craving, and it made me thankful that I was free of the habit. This, however, is a digression, and I must return to our tramp.

The whole line of the coast was strewn with wreckage, the shattered timbers of old boats that had been cast ashore on these cruel rocks. There were also the bleached bones of hundreds of great seals showing what huge hunts had taken place here in former times, and how many of those elephants had been

massacred. Yet the coast was still crowded with seals—great nurseries of youngsters who had just left their mothers and were gambolling about like young puppies, barking and playing pranks in the way I have previously described. They were a little shy of us at first as we walked among them; but they did not scurry away, but permitted us to stroke them. All the males, however, young as they were, were fiercer than the females, and darted their heads out at us and opened their jaws and barked. It would not be long before these lusty young fellows became warriors like their scarred and wounded sires, whose spirit they had inherited, and whose fierce deeds they would emulate. But the little girl seals were gentle and timid, and it was pretty to see them getting playful and coy as we stroked their hair. They were not very beautiful, but by a little imagination one might have believed them to be the mermaids of old mythology whose siren songs enchanted Ulysses and his comrades as their ship sailed among them.

We found two uncharted points on the coast against which the sea dashed with heavy breakers, and as we tramped on we came to a big stream pouring into the sea down a valley in the hills. Near here we came across the skeleton of a ship's keel. She had been a sailing boat—a schooner, I should say, of about 150 tons—and now was nothing but a rotten carcass with a few gaunt ribs sticking out. There was also a good deal of other wreckage here.

We walked on and on, and then we had the greatest sensation of our lives. I shall never forget the profound and startling emotion of that moment. Even now as I write, with the memory of it vivid in my mind, my heart beats a little quicker at the thought of that thrill, of that shock of surprise and gladness. It was about noon, and Agnès and I were thinking of the meal which it was time to have, and we were both silent, gazing ahead of us and across the plateau to the north-east. Suddenly we both stopped, with low exclamations, inarticulate and emotional, and

our eyes stared in a north-easterly direction, as though we had been bewitched. I think I was the first to speak.

‘Smoke!’ I said. ‘It is a steamer!’

There, away on the far horizon, was a trailing wisp of smoke curling steadily round the foreland, as it seemed to us, though it was far from the coast-line. Only a thin wreath of smoke, but to us, exiles on a desert island for ten long months, wanderers in a world of loneliness, it brought a message of humanity and gladness, so swift and sudden and unexpected that we were spell-bound.

Agnès gave expression to his own dearest hope:

‘Captain,’ he said, ‘I would give anything if that boat came in and brought some tobacco!’

We were both wildly excited, and not for a single moment did our eyes leave the trail of the smoke. Our very souls kept vigil over that little smudge of moving shadow against the grey-blue sky. ‘Is she coming round?’ We asked the question with almost torturing anxiety. Secretly each of us believed

that she was a steamer on her way to Australia, but we thrust the horrid thought away from us and buoyed ourselves up with the hope that she would come into one of our bays, bringing new faces, new voices, new friends, news of the outside world, and treasures for exchange, to us poor lonely vagabonds who, truth to tell, were getting very weary of our loneliness, and craved for other society than our own. So we kept watching and waiting, and presently we were dismayed and ready almost to weep, because the smoke was lost to our view behind the headland.

‘Oh, she is going away!’ cried Agnès dolefully, and I shared his misgivings, and became very gloomy. But I said:

‘Let us wait, my friend, perhaps she will come round the coast, and we shall see her in the sound here.’

We calculated the time she would take to get round. It would take a long time, and we were very impatient!

‘Let us have that meal,’ I said. ‘It will help to pass the time.’

So we sat down and pulled out our hard old biscuits and our stale tinned meats, and munched away, wondering and wishing about the steamer, conjuring up the delight of grasping the hands of good seamen—perhaps from France!—of dining on board with these new friends, of telling them all our own adventures. Several times, just to tease poor Agnès, whose lips were watering at the thought of tobacco, and sometimes because my hope made fools of my eyes, I shouted out that I could see the boat again. At last I really saw her. Yes, there was no mistake. There was the trailing smoke-wreath, creeping round Prince of Wales Foreland. Oh, the goodness of it!

‘There she is!’ I said, but Agnès thought I was joking. I had said it too often to be believed. But then he too saw the steamer—we could see her black hull now—and he jumped up like a madman, and danced wildly about the rocks, waving his arms and crying, ‘Tobacco! Tobacco!’

Unluckily we had left our rowing boat at



Molloy Point before setting out on our tramp, so that we could not row out to her when she came nearer to us. We saw her pass Murray Island, Long Island, Boyle Island, keeping clear of all those islets which strew the sound. It seemed as if she were steering straight for Observatory Bay. Agnès was rushing about gathering kelp with which he made a pile. I knew what he was about. He wanted to make a bonfire to signal to that passing vessel. I was tempted to let him set fire to that stuff to see the flames lick up as a message that human beings were on the rocks offering salutation to the newcomers. But then I stopped him, sternly and just in time. It would have been horrible if that steamer had put round, with the idea that we were shipwrecked, and had herself run aground on this brutal coast. She disappeared at last behind Grave Island, and we were uncertain whether we should ever see her again. Possibly she had put in for repairs into one of the innumerable bays of Kerguelen, and having made them, would steam away again before we had had speech with her.

That was a melancholy prospect, but again we played with hope. We could do no more exploring now. We must get back swiftly to the *J. B. Charcot*. We must tell our comrades of the stranger within our gates. We must follow that steamer as fast as our legs would carry us over the wild ground. So, always talking of the steamer and tobacco, Agnès and I trudged back to Molloy Point, where we found our boat again.

But we were overtaken by the worst of bad luck. A great gale broke loose upon us, and a heavy snow-storm enveloped us. It snowed and snowed till we could see nothing but those falling white flakes and the soft white carpet that was now upon the black rocks. It snowed until there were white hills around us. It snowed until we were nearly buried. If we had dared to attempt a boat journey we should have crashed upon a rock and drowned. So all day long we lay in our tent, cursing our fate, thinking and talking of the steamer, and kicking the canvas to relieve it of its white weight. It was a stupid busi-

ness, this kicking the snow off our tent, while perhaps our comrades were fraternising with the crew of that good steamer! Presently the snow melted, melted on top of us and melted all round us, while the gale blew more fiercely, so that soon we were wet even through our sleeping-bags, wet to the skin on the soppy ground. We had nothing to do but eat. We made a menu to last throughout the day. One hour we had a cup of tea. The next hour we had a cup of cocoa. At the third hour, by way of a change, we took a cup of tea again. At the fourth hour we greeted another cup of cocoa with enthusiasm. And so on, until we became tired even of eating and drinking, though it is wonderful how it made the time go!

All that day and night Agnès and I chatted more volubly than usual, and to keep our thoughts away from the steamer, which made us get too excited and impatient, I spoke to my comrade of Paris, to which he had never been, and told him about the theatres and the fine shops, and the Bois de

Boulogne, and the life of the city. We also read a little of Voltaire and Lafontaine, which we had carried with us, and Agnès was an interesting and original critic, viewing things with the simple unbiassed mind of a seaman who had never been to Paris!

The next day it was still too rough for the boat, but our impatience would no longer be restrained, and we decided to go to the summit of the high hill near the bay, from which we might search around for any sign of the steamer. It was a stiff climb, 1500 feet up those black slippery rocks, and the wind was so terrific that sometimes we had to crawl on our hands and knees and even to lie flat on our stomachs to prevent ourselves from being blown down the precipices. At last we reached the topmost peak, and with my telescope I swept the waters of Observatory Bay. There, to my great joy and to Agnès's uproarious delight, I saw the steamer anchored close to our own little ship. It was a noble sight for eyes sore with loneliness. The Island of Desolation was no longer so

desolate. Oh, it was a gay place, for my brother was receiving visitors.

Goodness knows how Agnès and I scrambled down the mountain again, sliding and slipping and tumbling and running and bounding until we reached our boat. We were in a fever of excitement. But it was too late and too dark to row homewards that night, and we had to wait until the following morning to pack up and get away. Our original intention had been to explore the surrounding country extensively, but, of course, with that steamer in Observatory Bay, such a thing was impossible to human nature, and Agnès and I had only one thought—to get back. Owing to the wind, we rowed for ten hours until we were utterly exhausted, but at last we came alongside the *J. B. Charcot*. The steamer had gone! Fortunately, as we found out, only to find a good place for an anchorage and headquarters. And as I stepped on deck Henri handed me a packet of letters from France, and to Agnès a roll of tobacco!

## CHAPTER IX

My brother told me that the vessel which had steamed to our Island of Desolation was the *Jeanne d'Arc*, commanded by Captain Ring, a Norwegian, like all his crew. They had come to establish a great factory for melting the blubber of whales.

Henri had been sitting with his telescope on the roof of the German house when he had first seen the trail of smoke, many miles away out at sea. He could hardly believe his eyes, but through his glass he saw the steamer quite clearly. He followed it with the same breathless interest which had held Agnès and me in its grip, and with the same hopes and fears, rejoicing when he realised that the ship was making steadily up Royal Sound. As she came she sounded her whistle, and then Henri saw that Bon-

temps, who was working by the factory, had seen the smoke and the ship and heard the signal. For a moment our bos'n stood as though turned to stone, with one hand shading his eyes. Then he threw down his pick and gave a strange yell, and, to my brother's amazement, began running round the shed, round and round and round again like a mad dog. There is no doubt, I think, that the sight of that steamer had turned poor Bon-temps's brain for a little while. Like Agnès, he had only one thought—tobacco! He craved for it, like a shipwrecked sailor for fresh water. It was the one great need and passion of his whole being, and the idea that that steamer might be coming with tobacco, or might, by some fearful stroke of evil fortune, not come, after the vision had met his eyes, worked a madness in his mind.

When at last the *Jeanne d'Arc* appeared, and dropped anchor in Gazelle Basin, my brother and his crew rowed out to her and hailed her. The Norwegians were the first to ask a question. 'Are there many whales about? We



haven't seen any !' 'Any amount,' came the answering shout. 'Have you got any tobacco on board ?'

This was the greeting between the newcomers and the 'oldest inhabitants' of the island. Then Henri went on board and grasped the hand of Captain Ring, and the Norwegians—there were more than a hundred of them—crowded round, eager to hear his story and to obtain from him a store of facts about Kerguelen. But the first good thing they gave in return was the packet of letters from France. It turned out that our parents had heard of the proposed voyage of the *Jeanne d'Arc* to Kerguelen, and had taken this opportunity of sending their love and news to the exiles far away. I need not say how wonderful it was to us to have those precious documents, to read them over and over again, to devour greedily every little scrap of news about our family and friends contained in them. We were like Rip Van Winkles, who had come back to life again after a long sleep, or like prisoners who,

after a term of servitude in the silence of a living tomb, come out to hear all that has happened in the world since they were put away. I think my readers will have no difficulty in imagining the condition in which Henri and I, after I had joined him again, sat in our cabin with those letters before us and talked over every line of them.

To go back to the *Jeanne d'Arc* and the Norwegians, it turned out that they had been two weeks in Kerguelen before they had discovered our small ship. They had gone first to Gazelle Basin, keeping a sharp look-out for us. There was a big gale on, and they saw the water blown high in vapoury spray by the wind, so that they believed it must be the smoke from our fires. They sounded their whistle in shrill blasts as a signal to us, but soon realised their mistake. Then they saw quite clearly the pathway we had formed by going daily backwards and forwards between Sandy Cove and our anchorage. Upon going ashore they discovered the bottles telling them of our future plans and probable where-

abouts. From Gazelle Basin some of the officers and crew went in a motor-launch to look for a suitable place in which to build their factory, and afterwards, in the *Jeanne d'Arc*, steamed to Sunday Harbour. Here they dropped anchor and, climbing to the top of a hill to survey the surrounding country, saw a ship in one of the bays.

The readers of my tale who are not so familiar with the geography of Kerguelen as I am, will guess perhaps that the Norwegians were looking down upon the *J. B. Charcot*. Truth to tell they were not. They were looking at a French brig called the *Carmen*, commanded by Captain d'Asté. By an extraordinary coincidence two vessels had arrived at the Island of Desolation, after we had lived there alone, with no other human being within many hundreds of miles of us, for ten long months. This news from the Norwegians that Frenchmen were on the island was the cause of great excitement to Henri and me and the rest of our little crew. It was good to think that in a little while, perhaps, we

might grasp the hands of our compatriots and hear news from France, and news from Paris! That was an immense treat in store for us.

It seemed that Captain d'Asté had heard about the *J. B. Charcot*. He had read an account in the papers of our proposed expedition, and that had given him the idea that perhaps he also might go sailing round the Island of Desolation. A rich and charming widow had fitted out his expedition and bought the brig in Marseilles, and with a crew of twenty on board he had followed in our track. The Norwegians in their turn had heard of the *Carmen*, and now they went on board and told Captain d'Asté of the news they had found of us in Gazelle Basin. Through those good fellows he sent greetings to us, and hoped we should soon meet. Then the *Jeanne d'Arc* had steamed round to Observatory Bay and had found the *J. B. Charcot*. They were absolutely astounded at the smallness of our boat, for they had been looking for a big sailing ship! They were very glad to meet Henri, but stayed only a

little while before searching further for a good place in which to plant their factory.

It was astonishing what a change the arrival of these two ships made to us. In reality we were just as lonely. The *Jeanne d'Arc* had gone away to another bay. The *Carmen* was on the other side of Kerguelen, and around us still were the great barren mountains with no human being upon them. Yet we had a sense of companionship, of an almost bustling human society. The arrival of the Norwegians was a topic of incessant interest to us. The knowledge of their presence in Kerguelen was cheering to us in the extreme, and the thought of Captain d'Asté and his French brig gave us something to look forward to with joy.

But now the time had come for us to work hard. Seals were swarming in the bays, our casks had to be filled, more casks had to be made, and great days of hunting lay ahead of us. I became very busy again at the cask business, and this time I took an apprentice like a true master of craft. It was

Agnès, and a very handy fellow he was, so that between us we could do a lot of work.

On 17th November we left Observatory Bay with the *J. B. Charcot* for seal-hunting. We dropped anchor between Charmner Rock and the shore upon which Agnès and I had lain in our tent kicking the snow off the canvas after we had sighted the *Jeanne d'Arc*. It was not a safe anchorage, because the sea-bottom was a very bad ground of rock and sand, and our anchors would drag if a south-westerly gale beat up. However, we put our trust in luck (a most fickle mistress when she rides upon the wind) and, lowering the boats, went on shore. Great herds of seals were lying lazily upon the rock ledges, and we went among them with deadly intent. For hours we fought with those big beasts, and if a spectator had been watching from a high rock, his soul would have stood aghast at the horror of it. It was butchers' work, only redeemed by the monstrous size of those sea-elephants, by their fierceness and brute strength, and by our own puny stature.

We were but pigmies against those herds of grotesque and gargantuan creatures. It was like an attack of primæval men upon the mammoths and megatheria of the pre-historic world. For miles around the rocks must have resounded with the noise of battle, with the angry bellowings of the bull-elephants, and with our own hoarse shouts. Blood bespattered the rocks, and we fought ankle deep in puddles of gore, and red streams trickled over the ledges and stained the sea. Butchers' work! Filthy, horrible, and brutal work. Yet we steeled our hearts, and were not over nice or sensitive, and when the twilight glimmered in the pearl-grey sky and shadows roamed among the rocks, many great corpses lay stretched out upon the shore. With our knives we hacked at those dead monsters—it was more horrid than the killing—stripping them of their skins, and slashing off the warm white blubber. When night descended upon us we had four full boat-loads of that precious stuff and another great pile upon the rocks, and we rubbed our greasy hands and called



it 'a good day's work.' We got the boats safely alongside the ship and hoisted the blubber on board, so that the deck was crowded with it. That night, as a contrast to our hideous work of the day, the sky was filled with a divine beauty, and we had a remarkable aurora australis, the best of the ten which astonished our vision during our stay in Kerguelen. Across the sky there glimmered bands of light, of a radiant whiteness and violet and purple, so that a glory was above our little ship, and enchantment flashed upon the mountain ridges of the land.

The next morning we went on shore again to collect the remaining store of blubber, but a strong north wind was blowing, and as the barometer was falling, we were afraid that the gale would jump to the south-west. We should have been more careful, but we were excited with the treasure of our great seal hunt, and so busy that we did not notice the increasing wind. Only my brother remained on board, and I, with Agnès, Bontemps, Larose and the boy, were hurling the pieces of blubber

into the two boats without a thought of the danger that was lying in wait for us. Presently I noticed that my brother had hoisted a signal to come quickly, and then for the first time I realised that the south-wester was rolling up an ugly sea, and that we should have a tough time in getting back to the ship. I shouted to the men to get away, and Agnès and I, with a full boat-load, pushed off and rowed for our very lives. Bontemps, Larose and the cook followed in the other boat, which was also piled high with the white fat. Agnès and I were making good headway in spite of the dangerous sea when I heard shouts from my other comrades, and, looking round, saw that they were in great trouble. Their boat was too heavily loaded, and when they had got half-way between the *J. B. Charcot* and the shore, I saw that they would certainly sink unless something were done without a moment's delay. It was impossible to get any of their blubber on to our own weight, so I shouted to them to throw it overboard. Larose and the cook began to do this in

frantic haste, while Bontemps at the oars tried to keep the boat steady, but the blubbers had been cut into such small pieces that it was difficult to relieve the weight in the boat quickly enough. I was half frantic with anxiety, for I feared that my poor comrades were doomed. They kept trying to come alongside, but were always beaten back, and their boat was lurching in an ugly fashion. Henri threw life-belts to them, made of canvas, stuffed with kapok, and mattresses stuffed with the same material. If their boat went down they might still have a chance of life, for these floating mattresses can support three or four men. Agnès and I had succeeded in getting alongside our ship, and at last, much to their own surprise and ours, to say nothing of our joy, the other men pulled close, and were hauled on board. It was a very narrow shave for all of us, and we were very thankful at having escaped the price of our recklessness. Then we hoisted anchor and ran to Island Harbour, which, you will remember, is not far away, in Royal Sound.

Here we stayed five days in dirty weather, exploring three islands in the rowing boat and on foot, and shooting a few rabbits. Then we returned to Observatory Bay to our oil factory, and worked hard for two days at the filthy work of blubber-boiling. But we were well pleased when, at the end of our toil, we had filled twenty barrels of fifty gallons each with the best seal oil.

It was now early in December, and we sailed with a number of empty casks and two kettles to meet Captain d'Asté on the *Carmen* in Weinock Bay. This was to be purely a pleasure trip for the sake of a greeting with our compatriot and his little crew of French seamen.

Did I say a pleasure trip? Alas, it was a tragedy! We were running near Mouse Island (in Royal Sound) when a sudden snow squall blinded us and clothed us in its whiteness. We could see hardly a yard across the bows, for the snow came down as though the gods were having a tremendous pillow-fight, and dropping a heavenful of feathers. We

were horribly afraid of being driven on to rocks, for we were running swiftly with the wind hard astern, with our boom right out and with our main-sail stretched taut. Suddenly, when we were going on another tack, there was a loud report as though a gun had burst, and a splintering of timbers and wild flapping of sheets. Our boom had broken clean in two, and the weight of those pieces falling upon the deck had dragged down the main-sail, which was now without control, so that the fierce wind worked its will with it, and split it into shreds which flapped wildly, like sea-birds with wounded wings. We were in a pitiful plight, drifting helplessly on that dangerous coast. The squall ceased as suddenly as it had burst upon us, and then we saw that we were almost ashore on Mouse Island. Another two minutes and we should have been smashed to splinters. We worked ferociously to escape this doom. Quickly we rigged up a storm sail and mizzen, and under these sheets we ran for our old anchorage off Grave Island. Next day, as some compensa-

tion for our disaster, we were favoured with a gust of good luck. An east breeze blew (the rarest wind off Kerguelen), and with this we got back to our headquarters in Observatory Bay. But we had suffered a real calamity. What were we to do with our ragged mainsail, torn to tatters, and with our broken boom? It was impossible to mend the boom, and we had no spar big enough to replace it. The only thing to do was to abandon a boom altogether and to use free tackle instead. With regard to the sail, we had to rely upon careful tailoring. Fortunately Henri, my brother, is a first-class sailmaker, having been mate for a long time on a big four-master. Bontemps also knew a good deal about sail-darning, so these two sat down to serious work. They had to cut about half the sail away, so cruel had been the damage, and to let in fresh pieces from the canvas we had in store. It was an eight-days' labour, and that amount of lost time.

I decided to use the time, as far as I was concerned, by another excursion in unex-



explored territory around Long Island and elsewhere. This time I took Larose, as Agnès was required by my brother on the ship, being so intelligent and trustworthy. Larose and I, therefore, took to the rowing boat, with sufficient stores for a week's trip, and worked our way between Long Island and the mainland. Here I was startled by an extraordinary sight. It was a row of long white buildings! I rubbed my eyes and wondered whether I were dreaming, or whether I had suddenly been bereft of my senses. Then I saw our old friend the steamer, and immediately I guessed the meaning of those remarkable buildings. The Norwegians were putting up their factory. Indeed, by a kind of miracle, they had already built a number of white wooden sheds of a truly magnificent appearance, on such a place as the Island of Desolation.

Naturally, Larose and I desired to present our compliments to the builders, and, rowing as though a vision of Paradise had suddenly opened before our eyes, we arrived



at the Norwegian station in the very nick of time for dinner. Larose, of course, was dreamy-eyed with joy, and proceeded to reveal to an astonished crew the vastness of his appetite. For myself I can truly say that those days with the officers and crew of the *Jeanne d'Arc* were a continual delight. It was good to meet those fine cheery Scandinavians, to sit in the officers' cabin chatting over adventures, to see so many new faces, to feel once more that there was such a thing as human society, to hear the chatter of voices and the music of laughter, and to be amidst all the bustle of a big ship, which, after my long loneliness, seemed like a noisy city seething with busy life. It was good—oh, very good!—to sit down to a new dinner-table and to eat new food. Good heavens! I shall never forget the thrill with which I saw a plate of porridge put before me. Porridge! It tasted like the ambrosia of the gods. And there were eggs, and Norwegian salt-fish, and jam, and all sorts of amazing and delectable things. We had

little evenings on board. I began to remember that I had gentle blood in my veins, that I had not always been a savage on a desert island, killing big beasts and cutting them up. Why, the cabin of the *Jeanne d'Arc* was like a drawing-room in Paris! We had concerts, for there was a gramophone on board which played the latest operas to us. On the Island of Desolation, with the great black mountains stretching away in a solid sea of grim untrodden peaks, I first heard the melodious strains of 'The Merry Widow,' and my friends told me how it was 'all the craze' in Europe. They made a hero of me! Of this wild, dirty ruffian called Raymond Rallier du Baty! They asked a thousand questions about our trip. Again and again they expressed their astonishment at the tiny ship in which we had ventured so far. And then they were never tired of hearing all about Kerguelen, and for hours we talked the jargon of the sea, of soundings and wind force, and barometrical readings. They asked if I thought the place they had selected for their factory was a good spot.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘it is admirable. There is a good beach and a stream of fresh water—but’—they looked anxious at this ‘but’—‘I am afraid,’ I said, ‘that you will find no whales in Royal Sound.’ They were dismayed at this news, and afterwards it turned out to be right, so that they had to go a long way from their headquarters to the whale-hunting.

On my side I was intensely interested in all these arrangements and plans, and especially in the building of the factory. They had come with a magnificent equipment, and brought the sheds in pieces ready to be fitted up, and carpenters and smiths, and other craftsmen in addition to the ordinary crew. It was a different thing from the *J. B. Charcot*!

They were good fellows, those Norwegians, and I remember them with gratitude. Captain Ring was the kindest of men. Mr. Elleffsen, the manager of the factory, could not do enough for me. They were prodigal in their generosity. I told them I wanted to ex-

plore the country on the other side of a narrow neck of land called Swain's Haulover, and that Larose and I would have to drag the boat across. But the Norwegians would not allow us to attempt this alone. They came as our escort, and Larose and I walked with a gay company. For Captain Ring and Mr. Elleffsen and all the officers came to help us, and hoisting the boat on their shoulders, carried it for three-quarters of a mile, while others carried our provisions and stores, which were all dumped down on the shore of Swain's Bay. They shook hands with us most heartily, and wished us good luck and a safe return, and then went back to their own ship, leaving us with very warm hearts at the thought of so much kindness.

Well, there were Larose and I on the edge of the sea, facing an unknown tract of country. We were out for adventure, and, packing our stores into the boat, pushed off and tried to row northward. But a strong gale broke upon us, and we were beaten back among the islands. At 9 o'clock at night,

when it was nearly dark and the wind had dropped, we rowed across to the opposite shore and saw the magnificent and unforgettable sight of the setting sun lighting up the snow-capped summit of Mount Ross, 6000 feet high. It was overspread with an immense white cloud like a parasol, and flushed with rose-pink in the sunset. At midnight we reached the head of an unnamed and uncharted bay, and here we put up our tent and, snuggling into our sleeping-bags, took a well-earned rest.

On the following day Larose and I set out on a long tramp in the quest of some hot springs reported to exist in the neighbourhood. We searched all day, but did not see any, and I feel convinced that those hot springs are of a mythological character. We again slept in our tent for the night, and then, early in the morning, struck across land and reached Table Bay at night, after a very hard day. We had tramped steadily for many hours through a country wilder even than any I had yet explored. Once we came to a

mountain torrent surging below in a deep rocky gorge, too wide to jump, so that we had to make a long detour southward. At last we found a big boulder caught between the sides of the gorge, which we used as a bridge, after losing two hours by this delay. Then we had to cross a range of uncharted ice-hills, steep and sharp and slippery, across which we stumbled, suffering now painfully from foot weariness. We had come in walking shoes in order not to be weighted down by heavy sea-boots: mine were nothing stronger than Paris boulevard shoes, and they were not designed for the rocks of Kerguelen. They were torn and cut to tatters, and I had to tie a piece of string round one foot to keep the sole on. I had gloomy forebodings of the return journey. It would be an awful thing to walk back barefoot.

Larose and I were thoroughly exhausted when we reached Table Bay after that grim struggle over the ice-mountains, but after a rest we wandered about the shore for a little

while, and found a cave which excited our interest. It was a fair height up in the face of a steep basalt cliff, and I was first attracted to it by seeing some pieces of wood on the beach below, and then by a number of fallen boulders, which, either by accident or human design, made a series of steps up to the hole in the rock. We climbed up and found ourselves in a strange dwelling-place. It had evidently been inhabited by shipwrecked men. In the centre of the cave was a large stone, blackened with fire, and around this were five smaller stones for seats, so that it did not require much imagination to guess at the number of men who had found refuge here. It was clear, too, that they had stayed some time, for they had taken the trouble to make the sloping floor more level by an arrangement of planks and stones. They had left many relics behind. There were their oilskins mended with rope yarn, some American cotton jackets, a pair of sea-boots, and a number of spent cartridges of the old Winchester pattern. They had managed to



cook their food, and we found some ingenious contrivances for this purpose, such as a grill, made of barrel hoops fastened cross-wise, on which no doubt they had roasted wild birds. But the most curious thing was a cooking-pot made out of a sea-elephant's skull, covered with skin as hard as wood, and with the fin-bone as a handle. In one of the jackets I found some pages of an English novel, and the cave was scattered with egg shells. It was most strange to stand in this cave thinking of the romantic life that had been spent here, and of that little band of five shipwrecked men. It seemed almost as if presently we should hear their voices and see them scrambling up the boulder steps, to take their seats on those five stones by the round hearth-stone. But undoubtedly they had been rescued years ago, and only the relics remained to tell the story of their adventure. I took one of the sea-boots and cut the top down to make a shoe. I regret now that I did not take away the skull of the sea-elephant which had been used as a cooking-pot, but

it would have been a burden on the way back.

We spent one night near our boat on this wild coast. The ground on the beach was very swampy after heavy rain- and snow-storms, and I searched around for a more suitable spot on which to pitch our tent. But Larose was impatient for a meal, and when I was away he worked feverishly at getting the tent up. I was only away five minutes, but when I returned the tent was already up (though as a rule it took twice that time to fix), and when I came near, Larose, who must have been toiling with prodigious energy, was pretending to be very leisurely while he spread out the stores! I had not the heart to make him shift everything, though it was a vile place on a steep slope, and after our meal I passed a wretched night. Larose was not the most agreeable of companions. Having fed well and smoked his foul pipe through the sleeping-bag until the tent reeked with tobacco, he tucked in and snored blissfully, and the sheer dead weight of his fat body rolled

down the slope and lay close upon me all night.

On the following day I decided to get back, and though we had to go over those ice-mountains again upon another weary climb, we travelled faster as we knew the way. Getting back to our boat again at 6 o'clock in the evening, we rowed across to the opposite shore and reached Swain's Haulover at 10 o'clock at night. Here we pitched our tent, had another meal and some hot tea which was wonderfully comforting, lighted a hurricane lamp, and then tucked in for sleep. Early next day we took all the luggage out of the boat, and leaving it on the shore, carried our stores across the neck of land and hailed the *Jeanne d'Arc*. At luncheon in the cabin with the Norwegian officers I gave them a full account of our adventure.

It was then Sunday, and at noon a terrific gale started to blow. Captain Ring, who was not yet acclimatised to the storms of Kerguelen, was very much alarmed, and feared that the *Jeanne d'Arc* would snap her cables and

go ashore. Some boats which had been floating astern broke their ropes and were flung on the rocks, and then Captain Ring gave orders to get up steam. But in three hours the storm spent its fury and the danger passed.

Larose and I slept on the *Jeanne d'Arc* that night, and next day our good friends came with us to fetch our boat. To my great dismay I found it overturned and smashed. I had made a fatal mistake in unloading the stores, which would have weighted it down. It was a great misfortune anyhow, for we had already broken two of our smaller boats during storms, and the others were too big and heavy for coasting trips.

Seeing my distress, Captain Ring and Mr. Elleffsen immediately offered their assistance, and, helping to carry back my poor battered boat, they handed it over to one of the carpenters to be patched up as skilfully as he knew how. This was done to my profound satisfaction, and we returned to the *J. B. Charcot*, glad to find her safe and sound in spite of the gale.

A few days later I rowed back to the *Jeanne d'Arc* with a little present for Mr. Elleffsen, as a small return for all the kindness I had received. When he visited my brother his eyes caught sight of a little Berthon (collapsible) boat which I had bought in Brixham Harbour. It only held one, and had not been of much use to us, but Mr. Elleffsen had a fancy for it and offered to buy it. Of course I was very glad to give it to him.

Meanwhile two smaller whale-steamers had joined the *Jeanne d'Arc*, and one of them named the *Éclair* was about to set out on a visit to Captain d'Asté of the *Carmen* in Weinock Bay, in order to obtain some petrol which he had to spare. The Norwegians invited me to join them, and I was delighted at the idea of meeting at last the French officer and his crew whose presence in Kerguelen had excited in us so much interest.

## CHAPTER X

IT is unnecessary to say that the greeting between Captain d'Asté and myself was of the heartiest kind. Each of us was rejoiced to find a brother Frenchman in Kerguelen, and we were the best of friends at once. Captain d'Asté was a young fellow of my own age, tall, well set up, and with a black beard. He was full of gaiety and courage, though he had encountered many perils since coming to the Island of Desolation. He had a square-rigged ship utterly unsuited for the tacking required in these waters with their narrow bays and constant squalls. It had been calm when the captain first sighted this wild country, and in the innocence of his heart he believed the fine weather would last. But during the calm he nearly drifted on to Cox Point, and then a south-west gale sprang

up and sent him scudding northward on to Castries Island. Here he anchored, but the terrific swell dragged his cable chains till they nearly broke, and afterwards, when the gale was over, he broke one of the flukes of his anchor in hauling it out of the rocky bottom.

He ran for Weinock Bay and stayed there three months, finding a fairly good anchorage, and not caring to leave the shelter for another encounter with Kerguelen squalls. He was glad to find that Howe Island close by was swarming with seals. As his motor-boat had a broken battery he rigged up a sail on her, and got plenty of blubber as provender for a very fine melting-engine which excited my envy and admiration. It was one which would boil two tons at a time.

Captain d'Asté told me all these incidents in his vivacious way, and late into the night we talked together, one story of adventure leading to another, though half the tale was still untold. It was a great night, a great talk! You may imagine that when two French seamen get together, and when one



of them has been on a desert island for ten months of loneliness, and the other has come straight from France with the latest news of Paris, there is much to say. Many of d'Asté's crew were from Marseilles, and it amused me immensely to hear the southern patois again. And the youngest among them was a little cabin-boy only ten years old, whom they called 'Jean Burt' after the great navigator. He had a companion not much older than himself, and these two youngsters were little gamins of Montmartre, neither of whom had been to sea before! Poor urchins! They seemed happy enough, and they were petted by the captain and the crew, but I could not help thinking of that other little cabin-boy of ten years old whose tiny grave I had seen among the mounds on Grave Island. I was unable to stay more than one day with my gallant compatriot, because the whale-steamer, having obtained the petrol for which Captain d'Asté had no further use owing to the breakdown of his motor-launch, was anxious to return to the *Jeanne d'Arc*. I went with them, of

course, promising d'Asté that I would visit him again with the *J. B. Charcot* and our company.

In fulfilment of this promise we set sail towards the end of December from Observatory Bay and were favoured by a spell of fair weather. We were at sea on Christmas night, and although we did not have a great feast, we celebrated the occasion by a little *réveillon* (as we say in France) after the change of watch at midnight, cracking our last bottle of wine and drinking to all our loved ones in France.

As we rounded Fuller's Island, Captain d'Asté and his men saw us, and being in a hurry to meet us and to reconnoitre the ship in which we had had so many adventures, they rowed out to us. We hoisted our flag in salutation, and presently they came on board, expressing their profound astonishment, like our Norwegian friends, at the smallness of our ketch.

Captain d'Asté stayed to dinner and all the following day, and we did our best for him

in the way of food. But better than the food was the conversation which flavoured it. Henri, I regret to say, was still very ill, but he brightened up with the gladness of hearing news from France, and chatting with this fine French seaman. Then we exchanged gifts, receiving sweets, chocolate, gingerbread, dried plums, and other toothsome things, which included a barrel of salt pork. We also asked for some rum, as our men were facing a time of rough toil in the way of seal-hunting and blubber-boiling.

We decided, however, that it would not be fair to hunt in d'Asté's waters, as he was a prisoner there, so with Agnès I went on a boat trip to explore other bays round and about the Sunrise Islands. It was a dangerous voyage, and once again Agnès and I were caught in an ugly sea with a strong north-wester. We pulled and pulled and did not seem to make any headway. It was grim work and tested our strength and endurance to the last ounce, but at last we touched Dauphin Island, and with a shout

of gladness dragged our boat on shore. We were on the look-out for fur seals, for we had been told that they were to be found in this part of Kerguelen, but we did not find any; and, indeed, we did not see a single fur seal during the whole of our stay in Kerguelen. From Dauphin Island we went across to Castries and found a long bay on the east side so extremely narrow that it could be stretched by two cables' length. There was no such thing as Terror Reef, as marked on the chart, but there were a number of small breakers nearer to the coast.

We found a number of albatrosses and poked them off their nests to get at their eggs, but we had to be careful of their tremendous beaks. We lived on eggs at this time, and found that two from an albatross's nest were sufficient to make an omelet big enough for six hungry men.

After this trip we said farewell to our good friend Captain d'Asté and sailed off to Harbour Island, where, as the reader may remember, we had found the five big kettles. It

was the last we saw of the *Carmen*; but before describing our future adventures, I think it well to mention the good fortune which befell the captain. He did not find it in Kerguelen, though he killed many seals and made much oil. It came to him when he returned to France, for he married the lady who was the owner of his ship. I called on her when I also had found my way back to France, and she was a most charming and interesting woman. Captain d'Asté is now again in Kerguelen with a better ship on another great sealing expedition.

After this we made our headquarters for a time in Elizabeth Harbour, where there were a great many seals. It was a very dangerous entrance, full of rocks which are invisible in calm weather, but lash the sea into great breakers during a north gale.

We had brought another big kettle and a great supply of wood from Harbour Island, and we settled down to the hardest work of all the time we spent on the Island of Desolation. We built a furnace with stones and

turf at the foot of Mount Bailey, and for a month we did nothing but kill seals and melt blubber. I will spare my readers the horrors of a detailed description. I have already given an idea of the horrid business of hunting seals, of the rocks running with blood, of those great monsters struggling and fighting till a bullet put an end to them, of the nasty butchers' work of skinning them and cutting up the blubber. It was dirty work, and the memory of it makes my gorge rise. In a few days we were soaked in oil. It worked its way into the warp and woof of our clothes until they were sticky and stiff and slimy and stinking with it. I shall never forget the nauseous feeling which came over me every morning when I had to put on those working clothes. I shuddered when I put on the trousers. I sickened when I put on the jacket. The grease plastered our hair and oozed through every pore of our skin. Everything on the ship was full of oil. The deck was slippery with it. It found its way into every crack and cranny. It got into our

food. It made my papers greasy when I tried to write my notes.

To make matters worse much of our work was in vain and had to be done all over again, in consequence of two strokes of ill fortune. We had been killing all day in Bailey Bay when, owing to the darkness and a rough sea, we had to leave the blubber in a heap covered with tarpaulin and stones. We went on foot to the *J. B. Charcot*, and next day it was too rough to fetch the boat. Then Agnès and Larose and I went to bring back our blubber. But it had disappeared! The tarpaulin was almost flat on the ground, the boulders were still placed upon it, but two tons of blubber had gone! There was no mystery about the manner of its disappearance. Hundreds of giant petrels, birds as big as albatrosses, sat around gorged to repletion and in a sleepy stupor. It was a disgusting and loathsome sight. Dante himself imagined no more obscene sight in hell than these bestial birds swollen with the blubber they had devoured.

Well, that was a serious loss to us, but a



few days later a worse calamity befell us. The ground around our 'factory,' as we called it, our primitive melting-furnace and pots, was soaked in oil, and before going aboard each night we used to throw water over the furnace to put out the glowing embers. But one night a little fire must have been left smouldering and, as we reckoned afterwards, at about 2 A.M. the fire flared up and caught with its hot breath the large tank of oil which we had left ready for filling the casks. There must have been a tremendous bonfire, but the man on watch happened to be fast asleep, so did not see the glory or the horror of it! We knew nothing about our second calamity until, early next morning, before taking coffee, the men set out to light the furnace. They came back quickly, and Henri and I could see by their very long faces and gloomy looks that something bad had happened.

'Speak up!' I said. 'What's the matter? What on earth is wrong with you?'

They could hardly be prevailed upon to tell the news, but little by little the whole

tragedy was revealed to us. The oil in the tank had burnt out, and the flames had licked up a row of eighteen full casks (out of the fifty we had stored there) so completely that only the iron hoops were left. 'That was eight days' hard labour lost! We could have sat down and wept at the thought of it. But that being a foolish thing to do, after all, we went to work again instead, and by 5th February of 1909 we had killed all the seals in the neighbourhood and filled all the casks that we had with us, which we tied together in tens, floated out to sea, towed to the ship and hauled on board.

We sailed back to Sandy Cove in search of more seals, but there were only a few, so that we set off for the north of Howe Island or White Bay. Bad weather set in and we were beaten back twice. We tramped across to Observatory Bay and wrote a message for the Norwegians, which we put in a bottle and tied to the key of the German house, so that they would be sure to find it. Then with the little ship we left

Sandy Cove again and sailed north to Cape Francis. It was then the 15th of February, and we noticed how the sea was breaking over hidden reefs. Henri made a remark about them.

‘You see what a lot of uncharted rocks there are about,’ he said. ‘We shall have to keep a sharp look-out.’

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than there was a crashing, grinding noise; the bottom of our ship, sailing at many knots in a strong north wind, ripped over a reef, and her stern stuck fast on one of the rocks! Here was a vile stroke of ill luck! Our position was perilous in the extreme. A gale was blowing as usual, and though we lowered the sails with the exception of the jib, we swung round to eastward, the long rolling swell lashing up against the stem of the ship. The tide was going down, and the weather was so threatening that I advised Henri to leave the ship and take to the boats. If our keel had been ripped open, we should scuttle for a dead certainty. Just as I was

speaking our poor ship was shaken by a kind of earthquake and shuddered from stem to stern, and then, when the next swell came, she was carried right off the rock and was afloat. We breathed again with intense relief, but there was still the prospect of finding rising water in the hold, and of having to abandon a sinking ship. We took to the pump, but to our great joy and astonishment there was not a leak.

Ah, these were good old timbers which I had bought for £60 in the Boulogne shipyards! The *J. B. Charcot* was worthy of her name. She was dauntless and unconquerable. Our pride in her was well justified. We sailed her back again to Sandy Cove, and had the idea of beaching her in Gazelle Basin to examine her rudder. We were not quite certain whether that had not been badly damaged. But the next day was so clear that by swinging over the side we could see right under her. The rudder was safe and strong, and we had nothing to worry about except Kerguelen weather, which, to tell the truth, was about

as worrisome as you will find anywhere in the world !

On February we sailed away again, keeping clear of the rocks, and then towing our ship towards the entrance of Fuller's Harbour. From that anchorage we visited Howe Island in a row-boat and afoot, and found a good many sea-elephants. But with a telescope we could see still greater numbers in M'Murdo Island, and we decided to push on there, through Boat Passage and into an uncharted bay, which we called Fallières Bay, in honour of the President of the French Republic.

We dropped anchor here and stayed another month, killing seals and melting blubber in the same old filthy way. There were two big blubber kettles on M'Murdo beach, and not far away were more than two hundred sea-elephants; so what did we do but, with a really barbarous sense of humour, set up the kettles in the middle of the herd, with the furnaces all ready for melting the blubber of these poor huge beasts, who did not understand their doom ! There was a great killing,

but really I am not proud of our exploits, for it was a sheer massacre, and only done out of stern necessity. One need not sentimentalise over sea-elephants. Their only use to the world is to provide blubber, and on the rocks of the world's wild places they lead a lazy life, varied only by savage and bloodthirsty fights; but for all that, I did not like the work of killing them. Still less did I like the melting of the blubber, which made me a living grease-spot, contaminating anything I touched. If any one had put a match to me, I should have burned like a tallow candle. Fortunately, nobody was tempted to do so. Having filled one hundred and fifty casks to the brim, we still had a great store of blubber, and this we crammed into the hold, intending to get straight away back to Observatory Bay, where more casks were in readiness. Before leaving Fallières Bay, however, we had some very bad weather, which kept us prisoners for eight days with—you understand—that blubber in our hold! I doubt if you quite understand what that meant. I think no words of

mine could convey to you all the horror of it. It began to melt, and it began to stink, and it went on melting and stinking until it seemed to us that humanity would rise in revolt in every part of the world and come in big ships to Kerguelen to kill us. We should have deserved it! We should have almost embraced death gladly to escape from that overpowering stench in our ship's hold! We ran away from it on excursions into the interior and by boat. But the infernal smell followed us whithersoever we went. It followed us round Aldrich Channel, and lay in wait for us in every part of Prince Adalbert Island, and pounced out upon us from two uncharted islands in Philip's Bay. It gripped us by the throat in another uncharted island by Zucker Strait. There was no escape from that appalling smell. To tell the honest but painful truth, we carried it with us everywhere, and polluted every breeze. Then we went back to the headquarters of the smell, to our poor stinking *J. B. Charcot*, where we lived with it again:



and ate it and drank it and breathed it as we sailed with her to Philip's Bay and thence to D'Asté Harbour, from which the *Carmen* had departed, leaving a little boat behind: and so on, with the ever-increasing smell, right round to Royal Sound, where we came as a horrible pest to the fresh air of these breezy waters. As if the wind would take revenge upon us, it sprang into a furious gale and lashed us and howled at us, and swept up the seas to drown us. But those seas swooned, when from our noxious hold we pumped out many gallons of that poisonous, evil-smelling oil. It was too much even for the sea, and it became calm, as though it had fainted away in sheer horror. We anchored to the west of Prince of Wales Foreland, and once more, in the vain endeavour to escape from the pestilential vapours, I went on land and visited the coast of Shell Water Bay, where I found some very old huts with roofs made of whale bones and walls of turf. It was no good. I added a great deal to my knowledge of geography, but I could not escape the smell which haunted

me like a foul fiend. So we ran quickly to Observatory Bay, and at last, by good grace, we were able to get out that half-liquid blubber and melt it, and after a smell that extended for a solid mile we got rid of some, at least, of its haunting horror. We had consolation also in the knowledge that we had not been alone in our shamefulness. We could smell the Norwegian factory for six miles around in any direction. At night, if we climbed to the heights, we could see the flares of their factory, glowing red like a hellish pit in the darkness, and figures crossing the light like little black devils.

At last our own dirty work was finished, and we washed ourselves and cast away our grease-soaked clothes, and put on cleaner garments (though not very clean) and surveyed one hundred and eighty barrels of refined, sterilised, non-smelling seal oil. We had accomplished our task and we were tired, but happy and contented now. Those one hundred and eighty casks had meant much hand labour and back labour to me! The oil inside

them had cost us a heavy price of fighting with storms and sea - elephants, of many wanderings, of many perilous adventures, of hard toil, of human degradation. It was almost like our life's blood.

My brother went from Observatory Bay with Larose to Jeanne d'Arc Harbour, where he was anxious to get medical attention from the ship's doctors, and afterwards I brought our own little ship along to fraternise with the big steamer. During our long absence the *Jeanne d'Arc* had actually been to Durban and back, bringing with her a Frenchman named M. Bossière, who had a concession from the French Government for mineral, pastoral, and building rights on Kerguelen. We had a few jolly days of holiday with all the officers, going on shore, inspecting the factory work, going for trips in motor-boats, duck-shooting, exploring the long fiord at the end of the bay, and spending merry evenings with them. It was a magnificent time of ease and luxury and enjoyment, after our long spell of loneliness and toil. Then she sailed again

on the 26th of April, with M. Bossière and Mr. Elleffsen, the manager of the factory, who was very ill. Captain Ring took command of the factory while his mate commanded the boat on the way back to Durban, stopping to place a powerful light of the newest type upon the north point of Murray Island, so that whaling-ships could find the fairway between Balfour and Hurston Rocks at the entrance of Royal Sound. This light still burns brightly, and will be of immense help to any vessels passing that way.

Then I left on the small steamer *Éclair* for a whaling trip with some of the Norwegians. In a rather dangerous fog we came off Cape Digby and steamed to the north of Outer Kent Island, where, a little while later, we sighted the first whale spouting its vapoury breath. It is a fine sport, this whaling, though with new scientific methods a good deal of the danger has gone out of it.

When a whale is sighted, one fires a harpoon from a bronze bombard loaded with black powder, and with a piece of cork as

wadding. The harpoon is just the size of the gun-barrel, and goes hurtling away to the whale, with a hawser which is uncoiled from the gun. It is thin when it first begins to uncoil, but at every hundred yards it gets thicker, and ends in a rope of strongest hemp. The whalers try to hit the whale in the lungs, near the flippers, when it is a fatal wound, for on the top of the harpoon are barbs which open out when they strike, and by doing so explode a little shell. Very often the whale is killed at once, but when only wounded it tries to dive, and the water is covered with blood. The boat tows gently to prevent the line breaking, and slacks it out for about four hundred yards. Then the brake is put on and the boat goes slowly after the victim. When the whale gets tired, the line is heaved up and then the whale is 'finished' by long lances with bamboo handles, which are plunged into its heart. Then the air-pumps are used through a hollow lance, and as the air is pumped in the dead whale rises, and is towed along by chains. I have

seen many schools of whales in one bay, so that the water has been black with them and the air filled with their spouting. They are quick-witted enough to know when they are being hunted, and try to escape from a passing whale-boat. But once, when we had killed a female, her mate rose and came towards us to see what had happened and to avenge her death.

Swenfoyn, called 'The King of the Whalers,' was the inventor of the deadly harpoon. It is five feet long and four inches in diameter, and is made of the best Swedish iron, being very soft and flexible, so as not to snap under a heavy strain. Each boat carries twenty of them, and the blacksmiths are always at work straightening them out. In Kerguelen are found no right whales, which always float when dead, but only the hump-back, fin-back and blue whales, the latter being ninety feet long.

We spent the whole of the day with the Norwegians, going on several of their whaling trips, and then at last, after fifteen months on the Island of Desolation, we decided to set

sail for Melbourne, to complete our voyage in the *J. B. Charcot*.

With deep grief, however, I was obliged to leave Henri behind. He was far too ill to come away with us, and take the risk of a voyage upon which there would be many hardships and certain perils. I waited until the return of the *Jeanne d'Arc* from Durban, hoping that by this time Henri would have recovered; but that was not to be, and he decided to live on shore and to put himself under strict medical treatment for a disease which was diagnosed as a kind of scurvy.

We were very low-spirited when, on the 1st of June, we hoisted sail after a sad farewell with Henri. I also was far from well, and both Agnès and I were suffering from gastric catarrh. We were touched, too, with melancholy sentiment at the thought of leaving Kerguelen, for we had become familiar with that land of grim and barren rocks. It had been our home for nearly a year and a half. It had been the scene of our adventures. We had explored its bays and channels and its



chaos of peaks. The Island of Desolation was haunted with our own ghosts, with a thousand memories of what we had done and suffered and hoped and fulfilled. We could not part from this stern foster-mother without affectionate regret. Yet we went away with a pretence of cheerfulness. We fired a salute of 'twenty-one guns' from one of our hunting rifles, and we hoisted the signal X-O-R—'Thank you very much.' From the *Jeanne d'Arc* fluttered the answering message, T-O-L—'We wish you a good passage.'

## CHAPTER XI

## HOMEWARD BOUND ACROSS THE WORLD

IT was about a fortnight before we lost sight of the black coast of the Island of Desolation on our way to France *viâ* Australia—a long way round to our native land! Upon leaving my poor brother and our good friends we sailed to north-west of Long Island, and at night anchored to the west of Mayo Island. There we stayed a week, for I thought it well to let my men stretch their legs and refresh themselves before the long track across the seas, when they would be imprisoned in the close quarters of our little ship. We killed about fifty ducks for our larder, and then, on 10th June, hoisted sail and cruised among the scattered islets north of Frog and Cat Island until we anchored in a calm off Murray

Island. Then, two hours later, a north gale blew, but we ran before it in the dark to the south of Balfour Rock, and at 4 A.M. the wind became so boisterous that we had to shorten sail. After thus beating about, there were four days of fog and calm, until on the 15th, at night, the mists were swept away by a new gale of more terrific violence. She began first in the north, and then took a cat-leap to the south-west. Our poor ship was bruised and battered and broken in the turbulence, and neither I nor Bontemps, who had been promoted to be mate, nor the other lads, believed that we should ever sell our oil in Melbourne. We shipped heavy seas which, as they pounced on us, smashed our port-side bulwarks. The wind came shrieking at us, and invisible hands snatched at us and tore our main-mast and bowsprit rigging. The crest of a great roller lashed to white foam, like the flowing mane of Neptune's sea-horse, hurled itself upon us, and left us bruised and staggering with our last row-boat split to pieces. We cast oil upon the waters like

the Biblical mariners, putting a canvas bag with dripping seal oil at the bows, which spread a thin sheet over the turbulent waves, while we lay-to under a jib with two reefs and a small storm-sail on the main. Snow squalls came at us like fluttering sea-birds, which lay down to die upon our ship and heaped our deck with their white feathers, and pecked at us with icy beaks, and put their wet cold claws down our necks, and covered us with freezing cloaks of down. This hurricane lasted from 8 o'clock of the 15th of June to 8 o'clock on the 16th, and I thought that all was over with us. After all our adventures in Kerguelen we were to face the last great adventure of death. The wind abated a little, and we held upon our course, but we sailed from one gale to another until it seemed to us that we should never escape from this eternal tumult of wind and sea until we reached the calm haven of death. We fought our way onward, and every knot we made was a struggle for life. We tried to appease the fury of the gods or

devils of the sea with plenteous libations. We had adopted a new dodge for pouring oil upon the sea. It was a small barrel slung over the bows, with a rubber hose going through the hawse-hole and with a sprinkler like the 'rose' of a watering-pot. We used this continually, and were swimming in oil nearly all the way to Melbourne—and as every drop trickled out we bled at the heart, remembering how we had toiled and fought on Kerguelen to get this treasure. The wind played its wildest pranks with us, and though we hoped always to get a westerly breeze before which we might run on a straight course to Australia, it blew from every other quarter but that with perverse ill-nature. It blew north. It blew north-east. It sprang to south-west. It even came from the south, sweeping up the cross-grained sea with a long ugly swell which tried to roll us over like a barrel.

At last by my reckoning we were approaching Cape Lewin, about two hundred miles from King George's Sound. Here we had three or

four days of good weather, for the Australian continent sheltered us from the full force of the north wind. On the 22nd of July we were about two hundred miles from Cape Otway. Then one other, and—by the grace of God—our last, gale blew hard, and we were driven near to King Island. I was in some perplexity as to our course because I was not sure that my chronometer was correct. But when the gale had spent itself we sighted Cape Otway on the night of the 24th July, and I knew that my reckonings had been absolutely true. At 9 A.M. we were six miles from Cape Otway, and I signalled the code 'J-P-N-C,' which was our international mark by which we had been registered before leaving France.

On the following day we saw a splendid steamer approaching us. It was a palace in comparison to our cockle-shell, and I guessed it to be the pilot-boat. I hoisted the flag asking for assistance, and flew the French colours from the main. Then, in honour of the expected visit, I hurried into a change of clothes,

for I and my crew were by this time the dirtiest gang of ragamuffins that could be seen on the high seas. We went barefoot, our clothes were greasy and in tatters, our hair was long and matted, and we were by no means good to look upon. But I made myself more respectable by putting on a red-and-white jersey (I confess it was not very clean!), a pair of torn boots, and a pair of old blue trousers which, in spite of being badly patched and tattered, were far superior to those I had been wearing on the voyage. On the whole I was rather pleased with my change of appearance, which I thought would be sufficiently impressive to any visitors we might receive.

When the steamer came closer we were hailed by the pilot.

‘Where are you from?’

‘From France,’ I shouted.

‘Good God!’ said the pilot, as though I had hit him in the chest.

Then he came on board—a tall, clean-shaven, handsome officer, with smart gloves on, and carrying a bag.



He stared round our little ship as though he were dazed with astonishment, and then looked round at the men who had brought it from France.

‘Who is the captain?’ he asked.

I felt a little hurt at this, because had I not put on a change of clothes?

‘Here he is,’ I said smiling, and holding out my hand, which he took in his neat glove.

. He looked me up and down, at my tousled hair, my matted beard, my tattered old breeches, my broken boots, my dirty jersey.

‘Well, I reckon you will be glad of a bath!’ he said.

I am sure he thought I looked a horribly dirty ruffian, but he disguised his feelings with great courtesy, expressed his admiration of our trip, and desired us to tell him all our adventures. He also presented us with the bag under his arm. ‘I thought you would be glad of a little fresh fish,’ he said. My sailors begged for tobacco, as they had exhausted their store five or six days before,

and they were perfectly happy when they lit up their pipes again.

We did our very best to entertain our guest in a worthy style, and I remember that dinner menu was as follows:—

Pâté de foie gras (saved up for many long months).

Fish fried in batter.

Almonds and raisins.

Sweet biscuits.

Coffee.

Our friend the pilot—Mr. Anthony—was pleased to express his pleasure.

‘Why,’ he said, ‘I thought you would be starving. This is as good a meal as you could get on a big steamer.’

I believe he was under the impression that we had eaten pâté de foie gras regularly on the way from Boulogne.

At 5 P.M. on 25th July 1909 we stood at the middle of Melbourne Bay. There was a choppy sea, and Mr. Anthony, who was used only to big boats, felt very uncomfortable.

‘I feel rather unwell,’ he said. ‘I think we had better drop anchor.’

We did this, and poor Mr. Anthony was very sick. But after he had tasted our vermicelli soup at dinner, he said it made him feel much better, and he was able to eat the rest of his dinner, while I told some part of my story to him.

At 7 A.M. next day we hauled up anchor, and at 4 o'clock on the same afternoon we ran into Melbourne Harbour. A number of yachts and motor-boats surrounded us, and for the first time in my life I was interviewed by journalists, who asked curious questions, peered and poked about my little ship, and were pleased to say that our little trip made a very good yarn. By these gentlemen I sent a cablegram to my father and mother. It was just a code word, but it carried a message which would delight them.

‘Arrived here. All well.’

In my locker under the bunk, where I had slept so many days and nights in grease-

stained clothes, I had kept a secret which was now to be revealed. I had been saving it up all this while. It was a Paris suit, which I had not worn since I left France. I put it on now, feeling almost ashamed of my own magnificence, and sneaked ashore, because of my long hair. I went straight to a barber's and had a hair-cut and a shave, and after that, when I walked the streets of Melbourne, I felt that I could look my fellow-men in the face. When I caught sight of myself in the shop windows I was impressed with my own appearance of gentility. I was no longer a savage!

Then I called on the French Consul, who, I found, had been very anxious for the safety of the *J. B. Charcot*. He had piles of letters for us, and grasped me by the hand with warm congratulations.

So my story ends, 15,000 miles away from France, as we had sailed, with many tackings in storms and squalls, and after all these wanderings and adventures which I have set down in plain style. My men were anxious

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to get back to France, and having sold our oil for a good price and without trouble, I paid them off, and sent them home in the French mail-boat *Nera*. I have not seen them since, though I have had letters from them. Good fellows all, they had served me with fidelity, with dauntless courage, with hard toil. They had been my comrades nearly two years, and together we had suffered many perils and faced death a score of times. Bontemps, Agnès, Larose, Esnault, you are the heroes of my tale. Always I shall think of you with affection and gratitude. In this book your names and deeds have been recorded with honour. Good friends, I take my leave of you, and wherever you are on the wide seas, I grasp your hands in comradeship.

I felt very lonely when I waved farewell to them. I envied them their luck in going back to France. I had to stay in Australia as a prisoner of fortune, until I could buy my ransom by selling my boat. Nobody wanted the little *J. B. Charcot*, in spite of her valour

and gallant spirit. And it went to my heart to put her up for sale after all her faithful service through frightful storms and in rock-strewn bays. She had cost me 15,000 francs, counting all repairs. I sold her at last for 5000 francs—just a handful of gold. It was a miserable price for so beautiful a boat. Dear little *J. B. Charcot*, I do not know where you are sailing now, but as long as I live I shall remember you. I know every timber of you, every grain in your wood. I tried you to the uttermost, and you did not fail. My spirit, and the spirits of Henri and the crew, haunt your little cabin and your narrow deck and every part of you. Brave boat, may you be handled by men who love you as we loved you. Sometimes I think they—whoever they may be—will be haunted by us wherever they sail; and that sometimes they will hear the faint music of an accordion, as when Agnès played at night off the Island of Desolation; and hear the grinding of Larose's 'biscuit mill,' and the voices of my brother and me as we

sat over the chart of Kerguelen in the tiny cabin.

I spent five months in Melbourne, working for my living at many strange trades, before I sold my boat and had enough money to return to France. My brother had already returned in a steamer from Durban, and I joined him in Paris in May 1910, rejoiced to find him in good health again.

The story of our voyage had leaked out, and we were honoured by many generous and distinguished men. Prince Roland Bonaparte, President of the French Geographical Society, gave us cordial greetings and recognition; and one sentence which he addressed to us seems to me the pleasantest thing that has been said about our trip.

‘You are sixteenth-century adventurers,’ he said, ‘lost in the twentieth century.’

That is a good compliment, and, indeed, though I make no claim to fame for what we did, yet, as Prince Roland Bonaparte has said, we voyaged like the sea-dogs of the



early romance of the sea, in a small boat and with a small crew; and our adventures on Desolation Island and on the wild seas were like those of the men who, four centuries ago, ventured out into the unknown in a great simplicity.

THE END











